

# cineACTION

**STAR  
IMAGI  
ICON**

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# ISSUE 55

## THE COLLECTIVE

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The Canada Council / Le Conseil des Arts  
1906-1997 / 1906-1997  
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We have a longstanding interest in and commitment to the study of star images and the construction of a persona both on and off screen. With Richard Dyer's *Stars* (bfi, London, 1979) a serious contemplation of stars was initiated, but the subject remains a relatively neglected area of critical investigation. One's response to stars is complex. On the one hand, the currency of a film star's persona is necessarily tied to the needs or pleasures which are prevalent in the culture at a particular moment; but the star's image and persona also speaks to the individual and the subjective and is closely connected to questions of identification and personal taste.

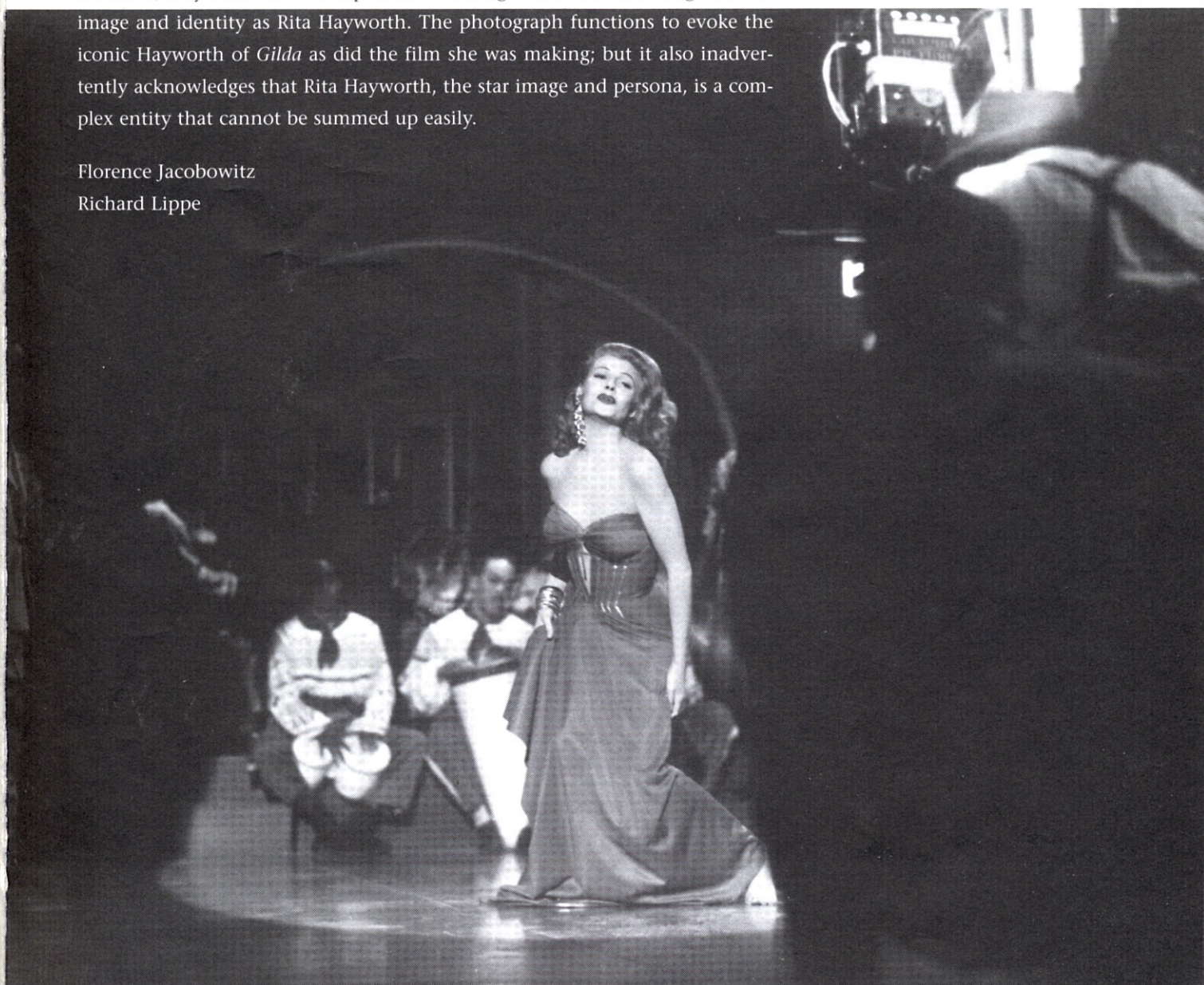
This is the third issue of *CineAction* addressing stardom (see issues 7 and 44), and we were pleased with the wide range of articles submitted. Film stars tend to inspire strong commitments and intense responses and articulating one's passion to a constructed image is challenging. Film criticism cannot be rigidly contained within the discourse of the academic and the objective and stars are an instance of that impossibility.

The image accompanying this editorial of Rita Hayworth performing for the camera on the set of *Affair in Trinidad* (1952) captures the notion of star construction; Hayworth is in the process of acting a role and enacting her star image and identity as Rita Hayworth. The photograph functions to evoke the iconic Hayworth of *Gilda* as did the film she was making; but it also inadvertently acknowledges that Rita Hayworth, the star image and persona, is a complex entity that cannot be summed up easily.

Florence Jacobowitz

Richard Lippe

# STAR IMAGE ICON





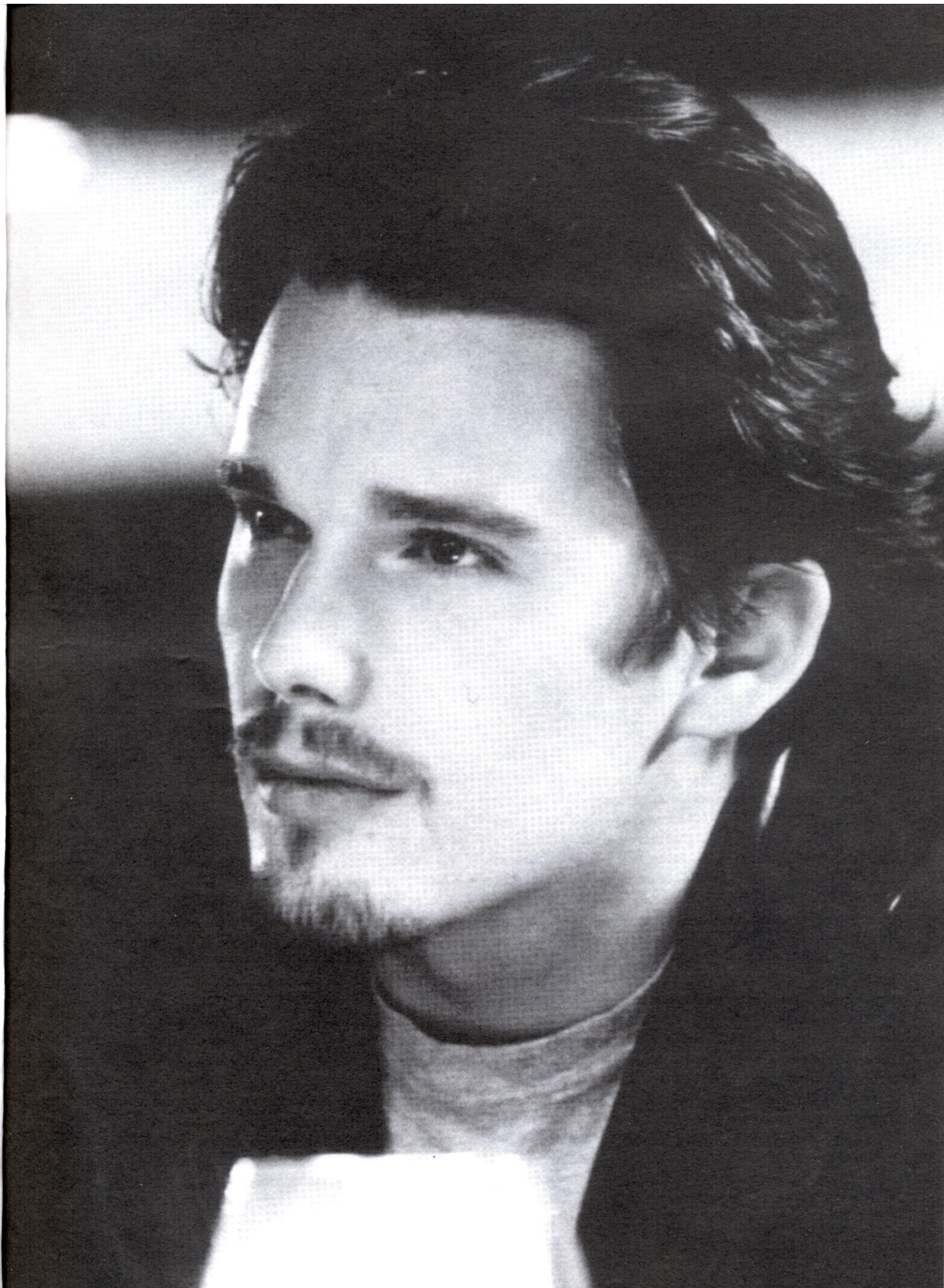
by Robin Wood

# HAWKE ASCENDING

Icon, image, star: Ethan Hawke refuses to slip naturally into any of these categories. Certainly not an icon, which suggests something fixed and permanent, graven in stone or metal, and Hawke, although he is 'always the same' (as a friend one thinks one knows is 'always the same') is always different, as one discovers new aspects of a personality one believes to be thoroughly familiar, unsuspected shades and nuances, as he continues to develop and deepen from film to film. Not an image, either: the term suggests something deliberately cultivated and constructed, perhaps by a studio, by producers, by publicity agents. And not exactly even a star, although he has played many leading roles (even, now, the most famous leading role of all) and regularly has his name above the title. But 'star' already carries connotations of icon and image, as something known and fixed (if capable of many diverse inflections). Julia Roberts is a star, one of the few remaining. She may amaze us with her abilities, she may extend her repertoire and range, but I don't think she will surprise us: we *know* her. But Hawke continues to surprise. If he betrays a consistent characteristic it's the *appearance* of total frankness, total openness, even as all the time he dreads revealing himself fully, yet by manifesting the dread he reveals himself all the more, reveals the vulnerability he would prefer people didn't know about but which becomes the most obvious, most manifest, aspect of the persona. He can be very aggressive, even brutal (already in *Reality Bites*, achieving full expression in *Tape*), but the aggressiveness is always a self-defence, the fear of getting deeply hurt is always there. One might say he was born to play Dickens's Pip, or one of the many possible Hamlets. He is also quite compulsive about giving himself to a role, so that, even as he dreads revealing himself, he cannot conceal himself. Person, personality, persona: the words merge into each other, and especially when applied to Hawke, who (onscreen) offers himself (with his disarming show of honesty, offers himself *up*) as all three: we know from Bergman's film that a 'persona' is both a mask and the person who hides (or believes he hides) beneath it.

Those familiar with my work will know that I seldom write this way, in a (kind of) semi-aware, semi-stream-of-consciousness manner, and I shall later examine Hawke's performances more objectively (though I have never been entirely objective—is anyone, even when they pretend to be?). But I wanted to establish a (kind of) imaginary relationship with Hawke (whom I shall probably never meet, except conceivably in the tense and artificial space of an interview), because I have always felt a curious (and very likely illusory) closeness to him—or to his screen per-









Mystery Date

sona. Perhaps I am wrong, and what appears on the screen is indeed a cunningly constructed image (though I doubt this even as I write it), but I have always experienced him as a *person* and imaginatively related to him as such, as I have never related to (to take a few names at random, as they come into my head) Robert De Niro, Adam Sandler, Rupert Everett or Clark Gable... And not because I think we have anything in particular in common, but because he seems to offer himself so frankly (even as he would like to run and hide, or assume a disguise) as a vulnerable human being: something very rare, both on- and offscreen, in both professional actors and those people one meets every day, either as acquaintances or in chance encounters in the elevator, who conceal themselves automatically, from force of habit. Very few stars give that impression. Method acting (a performance style to which Hawke clearly relates) has encouraged something like it, or more precisely a pretence of it ('being spontaneous', improvising) while equally discouraging it ('becoming' a character—if that were the primary criterion then surely Bette Davis and Beulah Bondi would be the greatest 'Method' actors, since Brando is always, irreducibly, Brando). One sees,

perhaps, more flashes of it in stars—especially female stars, always more aware of being 'objects of the male gaze'—who occasionally seem to 'give themselves away', to reveal a vulnerability that doesn't belong exclusively to the character they are playing: Rita Hayworth, Kim Novak, Sharon Stone... But they, unlike Hawke, are 'stars' first and foremost. Hawke has consistently, since quite early days, offered himself not as a star but as an *actor*. Paradoxically, it is as an actor, hiding behind the mask of 'being a character', that he reveals himself most nakedly.

### Beginnings

**a.** The child. Ethan Hawke and River Phoenix made their debuts simultaneously, in *Explorers*. Looking at the film today it seems clear that Hawke makes (or should have made) by far the stronger impression, yet it was Phoenix who soared ahead, through a meteoric career of extraordinary performances (it is heartbreaking, now, to watch *The Mosquito Coast* or *Running on Empty*) to a senseless, shattering premature death, while Hawke developed gradually (should one evoke the Hare and the Tortoise?) through a series of less



striking roles in less striking films. Yet one feels that the disparity cannot be dismissed as merely accidental: the actors' very different personalities must also be taken into account. Phoenix always seemed to be giving himself so completely, so unconditionally, with a kind of total openness, with the extreme self-confidence of the person with nothing to hide: 'Here I am, I'm showing you the whole thing, and if you don't like it, tough.' Whereas central to Hawke's persona is diffidence and reticence, a sense of 'Don't look too closely, there might be things I don't want you to see, I'm entitled to a little privacy aren't I?' We felt we 'knew' Phoenix; we never quite know Hawke. The moments of apparent frankness and openness may be the most deceptive of all, a pretence and disclaimer that there is no private person hiding behind there.

**b.** The teenager/young man. 1991 was a key year for Hawke. He had already distinguished himself in supporting roles in *Dead Poets Society* and *Dad*, where the characteristic combination of intelligence and sensitivity are clearly manifested, but 1991 gave him three very diverse starring roles, indicating three routes his career might have taken: *White Fang*, *Mystery Date* and *A Midnight Clear*. Their diversity suggests a point of hesitation, though whether the hesitation was Hawke's or belonged to the manifold pressures and influences surrounding a young and clearly promising (though unconventional) new star is not clear: perhaps a combination of the two. The first film is the least interesting, conceived within the bounds of a Disney 'Family Entertainment', and Hawke's performance is competent but conventional. The third most anticipates the direction he was to take (not always successfully) as he took increasing control over his career and choice of roles: the 'serious subject' or 'statement' movie, here the anti-war film. It is (surprisingly perhaps) *Mystery Date* that interests me most: overlooked at the time and now apparently forgotten, it stands up very well, repaying repetition, remarkably fresh and funny. And it belongs essentially to Hawke, for all the excellence of Teri Polo (whatever happened to her?) playing opposite him and B.D.Wong as a hilarious and charming (though always dangerous) villain. Hawke was twenty-one at the time but is playing (one supposes) eighteen, a shy, awkward late developer, growing up in the shadow of a charismatic elder brother, not to mention the family's prize dog, toasted at a celebration party by the parents and carried off to California for an award while Tom (Hawke) remains at home alone. The sense of a 'point of hesitation' is established from the outset in the scenario: Tom, having just finished high school, is faced with the necessity of deciding his future. Should he go to Yale to study 'business', or...?

The film is the closest Hawke gets to offering himself (or being offered) as a 'teen idol' of the kind we see come and go nowadays almost monthly: not the brash, self-assured variety (impossible for Hawke) but the diffident, vulnerable type, an identification-figure for insecure teenage boys (and of course we and they know he will reassuringly come out on top in the end) and very appealing to teenage girls, who will want to take care of him. But the film itself is by no means a 'typical' teen comedy: from the beginning it relates more to

screwball, and subsequently (as the corpses pile up and the sense of danger becomes engulfing) to those Bob Hope spy movies so popular in the '40s, with the crucial difference that, while Hope's comic cowardice was continuously cancelled out by wisecracks and never taken seriously, Tom's vulnerability is very real. This facilitates the development of one of Hawke's major characteristics, both as actor and in many of the roles he plays, the sense he conveys of spontaneity, the capacity for improvisation, the vulnerability countered not by smartass conceit (as with Hope) but by a 'natural' resilience and resourcefulness.

The film also introduces, in its early scenes, what is perhaps the central issue in considering the Hawke persona: 'sincerity'. When elder brother Craig unexpectedly reappears, he finds Tom infatuated with the beautiful 'girl next door' (Polo) to whom he has never dared speak. Craig takes over, calls her up in Tom's name, proposes a date for the evening. Tom is petrified; Craig advises him: 'The key is sincerity. Once you can fake that the rest is easy.' Craig attributes the remark to Olivier; Tom corrects him—'George Burns'. Olivier, of course, always tried to 'become' his roles, acting the 'sincerity' of each character, not always, in my opinion, very successfully, and he and Hawke have a very famous character in common; Burns developed the notion into one of his running gags, emphasizing the frank (i.e. 'sincere'!) cynicism that was one side of his complex comic persona. With Hawke the concept of 'sincerity' is inescapable, a constant of his roles and his performance style, already central to *Mystery Date* (where the heroine has to discover the 'sincerity' behind the pretence in order to fall in love with him), assuming considerable complexity in (for example) *Great Expectations*, where his character frequently acts in bad faith, his sincerity compromised, or in *Reality Bites*, where the character's real feelings are concealed beneath a cloak of bitterness and cynicism. The concept remains, however, a difficult one when applied to an actor. It is difficult not to think of Hawke himself as 'sincere' (the quality goes with his other constant, his seriousness). Yet how can this sincerity manifest itself if one is acting? Can we speak of the sincerity of the actor, as opposed to the acted sincerity of the character he is playing? I shall return to this question in discussing Hawke's Hamlet, in comparison with Olivier's.

*Mystery Date* also establishes Hawke's gift for comedy, suggesting an alternative direction his career might have taken, albeit within a Hollywood other than the one we have today: not the comedy of 'gags' and one-liners (and certainly not 'gross-out'), but the comedy of character and situation, more Cary Grant than Bob Hope. One can imagine him working successfully in something of the calibre of *Bringing Up Baby*, were there anyone today with the intelligence, sophistication and wit to write such a thing or producers with ambitions beyond the 'quick buck'. The gift of course remains, and surfaces intermittently in the later work when occasion allows.

### 'Seriousness'

What do we mean when we speak of a 'serious' actor? An



actor who undertakes 'serious' roles in 'serious' films? Or simply one who takes his craft seriously (as might certainly be claimed for Laurel and Hardy)? Both definitions apply to Hawke.

If there is such a thing as a Hawke 'image' it is the kind one has of one's friends and acquaintances: that is to say, not an artificially constructed image but an image indistinguishable from our sense of the person. In so far as such an image exists, I would say it is centred on a quality that has received little recognition: intransigence. The reason why no one seems to notice it is that it is never insisted upon, he is quietly and unobtrusively intransigent. One has the impression that he never courts media attention: when he gets noticed in the press (skateboarding down a sidewalk during the Toronto Film Festival, marrying Uma Thurman...) it seems accidental rather than advertised, let alone staged. His seriousness cannot be doubted, and it extends well beyond his screen career: he has published one very interesting novel and has written a second, which I await with impatience; he has developed an alternative theatre company in New York in which he is still active. If his choice of films and roles has not always been felicitous, it is never unintelligent and never crudely self-serving: one has the impression that if he can't win our interest through his work he would prefer to do without it.

One guesses that it was in the years following 1991 that he began to take more control of his career, choosing his projects, defining the kind of performer he wished to be, the kinds of roles and films with which he wanted to be associated: his brief appearance at the start of *White Fang II* and the lack of any follow-up to *Mystery Date* suggest his dismissal of two of the possibilities before him; his choice of *Alive* (1992) and *Reality Bites* (1994) suggest alternative notions of 'seriousness'.

The lure of the 'subject' (the 'Big' or 'Important' subject) has always been a temptation for the serious actor. Consider the case of Ingrid Bergman, who throughout her career longed to play Joan of Arc and finally got her chance in the Victor Fleming film version, whose only interest is its possible validation of the auteur theory: it emerged as a loose remake of *The Wizard of Oz*, without the songs and with Dorothy burnt at the stake by the Wicked Witch. Bergman seems not greatly to have valued the Hollywood films for which she will be remembered, those directed by Hitchcock, Cukor and McCarey. The temptation of the Subject is one to which Hawke has periodically succumbed, with very mixed results. *Alive*, after its stunning plane-crash sequence, defines itself as a 'problem' picture, the issue being cannibalism: have the surviving members of the football team the right to eat their dead comrades in order to survive? It was characteristically brave of Hawke to take (at that stage of his career) the potentially alienating role of the man who proposes and encourages what seems a sensible enough solution but not one generally greeted with spontaneous enthusiasm. The film, however, is terrible, under a director whose notion of directing seems to be 'Say your line, do your expression, and I'll cut to the next'. Two subsequent failures can also be

explained in terms of the seductive 'subject'.

In fact, the chief reason for sitting through either *Gattaca* or *Snow Falling on Cedars* would be Ethan Hawke, and if the former film is preferable it is because Hawke has more chance there to develop a characterization. The film itself seems in all other respects only half cooked. Essentially, it doesn't even offer a 'Big Subject' but only the pretence of one, its basis being a simple underdog-fulfils-his-great-ambition-against-all-odds story, placed within a pretentious futurist culture (somewhat like *Brave New World* without the 'orgy-porgy'). Some might find the 'great ambition' (going off on a space flight) more interesting than I do. There is almost no attempt to create a sense of a society beyond a lot of quite impressive architecture: we are told almost nothing of how these people live. Then throw in a sibling rivalry subplot (its resolution depending upon huge coincidence (the elder brother just happens to have become the new chief-of-police)). At least Hawke is able to make some impression, although his character remains strictly functional to the narrative, given little nuance. But *Snow Falling...* is much worse. One can see the attraction, for a (judging from his choices) left-slanting actor such as Hawke, of a film about the shameful treatment of Japanese Americans during World War 2, but it is difficult to take the premise (two young kids falling romantically in love for life) very seriously, and the actors tend to disappear into the scenery, or the 'beautiful photography'. Presumably Scott Hicks got to direct the film on the strength of the vastly overrated *Shine*, and he seized the opportunity to create a work to which the nearest to a positive response would be 'lovely pictures'. There is little else to look at until the last few minutes, where Hawke seizes his opportunity to convey, unforgettably, the sense of irreparable loss. It is a great moment in a bad and boring movie.

It remains somewhat doubtful whether many people go to a film because it is 'an Ethan Hawke film', the way many rushed off to the latest Brando or De Niro film in those actors' heydays. Is there, in fact, such a thing as 'an Ethan Hawke film'? I don't mean this negatively: to put it another way, I think Hawke is a great actor but not a Great Actor. One recalls Arthur Penn's distress when the editing of *The Chase* (to my mind still his greatest film) was taken out of his hands and takes in which Brando really 'took off' and improvised were discarded in favour of a return to the script. I think the editors were probably right: *The Chase* is an ensemble film, and Brando let loose to do his thing would have overbalanced his role. I have seen *Last Tango in Paris* only once in its now almost thirty years of existence: I'm sure it remains an interesting film, but I feel no great desire to watch a Great Actor showing off for over two hours. On the other hand, I have seen Cuarón's *Great Expectations* three times during its three years of existence, always with great pleasure, and the pleasure derives partly from Hawke's participation. Even *Hamlet* isn't dominated by Hawke, in quite the way Olivier dominated his version. Yes, there are such things as great performances in second-rate films, but there are no great films which are great because of one actor's performance.

Three years before *Gattaca* Hawke starred in *Reality Bites*,





*Reality Bites*

which can stand as a salutary antidote to the Big Subject phenomenon. It was undervalued in its day and now seems largely overlooked: if you mention the title, people look blank for a moment then say, 'Oh yes, the Gen X movie', in a tone that implies 'Been there, done that'. It's a marvellous small movie. It prompts me to say, however, that just as *Gattaca's* Big Subject (futurist prophecy) is largely illusory, so is the small subject (a group of young people making choices about their future) of *Reality Bites*: the subject could also be stated as 'How can a person of integrity survive within capitalism without succumbing to its temptations and becoming (to whatever degree) contaminated?'—which makes a modest film sound pretentious but is certainly a Big Subject. I could say all the banal things one says (or carefully refrains from saying) when one responds to a film ('It makes me laugh, it makes me cry, I love the characters, I can relate to them...'), and they would all be true. But what makes the film so pleasurable and durable (it deserves to outlive many more obviously 'important' works) is that all-too-rare sense of 'everything coming together'. I have no inside information about the making of the film, but the result suggests that it was as pleasurable a film to make as it is to watch. Every performance in its wonderful cast (aside from Hawke, Winona Ryder, Ben Stiller, Janeane Garofalo and Steve Zahn) feels alive, as if the aspic was really jelling, there

is a constant sense of creative excitement. Its pleasures are very much those of the ensemble movie, with its pervasive give-and-take among the actors, everyone responsive, no one trying to hog. It also contains one of Hawke's definitive roles and performances. If I was asked to select one moment in his career so far that seems to me to define something essential about the persona, my choice might be a moment about a third of the way through the film. Troy (Hawke) returns to the house at night and sees Lainie (Ryder) making love with her new beau (Stiller) in the back of a car; we sense his deep hurt. He goes in and awaits her, deliberately, cruelly provoking her with taunts about her yuppie boyfriend, then retreats into his book; she challenges him to speak out and say, for once, what he means. He closes the book, gets up, walks slowly up to her, takes her face tenderly between his hands, looks into her eyes, and tells her that he is 'really in love' with her (which we know to be true). She is caught off guard, disturbed, upset, divided. Then he abruptly laughs in her face and asks 'Isn't that what you wanted to hear?' The concealment of an authentic pain, the pretence that his sincerity was just 'acting', the sense conveyed of a deep and dangerous, hence carefully hidden, vulnerability, the impulse to hurt the person who has almost penetrated to it—all this strikes me as *echt*-Hawke, a moment when actor and presence become indistinguishable. The moment is answered,



quite beautifully, by a corresponding moment that introduces the film's final section, where Troy again confesses his love, this time honestly and touchingly.

Debates about 'acting' vs. 'presence', and which (in the cinema) is more important, seem too often weighted in favour of acting, perhaps because of the dominance of the Work Ethic: the actor must be seen to be working, and the harder the work the better, to justify his fee. Dana Andrews never got an Oscar nomination for his work with Preminger, he never acted *enough*, perhaps he should have taken lessons from Emil Jannings... Hawke's finest performances make the opposition meaningless: there, 'actor' and 'presence' become one and indistinguishable. Or perhaps he is at his best when he feels completely confident, when he can 'relax' (in so far as an actor can): either with a sympathetic director or with an ensemble cast. Or both. He is not an actor (like Brando) who will come on and 'do his stuff', and be brilliant in a vacuum. He requires a context, and interaction. I see this as a distinction, not a limitation.

As for the question I raised about capitalism, the film of course cannot answer it, the ending is the anticipated question-mark. But can anyone? Are not we all variously and to differing degrees corrupted by money values, competition, oneupmanship, greed?

### Literary Classics

'Great Expectations' (the novel) and 'Hamlet' (the play) represent Big Subjects of a somewhat different order, being felt and thought works of considerable achievement. The recent films of (respectively) Cuarón and Almereyda both raise the problem of cinematic adaptation in an acute form. Faithful or free? I have stated my position (roughly, that if you are making a film it is the film that matters, and you treat the material in the way to which your own creativity responds) elsewhere (in my little book on *The Wings of the Dove* in the BFI modern classics series) and shall not argue it at length again here. I find it more profitable to set the films beside previous adaptations of the same works.

It was inevitable that Cuarón's *Great Expectations* would be compared unfavourably with the 1946 British version, David Lean's film having become established (probably immovably) as a 'classic of world cinema'. Aside from its first twenty minutes it seems to me a bad film, its only achievement being its 'faithful' incarnation of Dickens' characters in the supporting roles. If your notion of great art includes the wax-works at Madame Tussaud's, then you will find this great art, but wouldn't it be better to reread the novel? The opening segment owes a lot to the art direction but much more to Jean Simmons, who could never conceivably have grown up to be Valerie Hobson; much the same might be said, though to a less extreme degree, of Anthony Wager and John Mills, but not because Mills is any more charismatic than Hobson. As for Lean's direction, the best that can be said is that the film provides conventional lecturers with plentiful material for 'Art of the Film 101'.

On the strength of *A Little Princess* and *Great Expectations*, Cuarón appears a born filmmaker, with an authentic feeling

for cinema (a certain form of cinema) in his blood. He belongs to a tradition whose leading exponents would include Ophüls and Minnelli, the tradition of *mise-en-scène* based upon camera mobility, or what Minnelli called 'camera choreography': in *Great Expectations* every sequence seems choreographed, the movements of actors and camera perfectly integrated within a decor. Anyone wanting a precise comparison with Lean might look at the two treatments of the pivotal scene in which Joe visits the newly affluent Pip in the city, to Pip's embarrassment and Joe's humiliation. In Lean the sequence is staged and shot with no more distinction than an average TV sitcom; in Cuarón it becomes a masterfully orchestrated piece of pure cinema, perfectly judged in tone, superbly choreographed. Lean's is 'faithful' to Dickens' text, Cuarón's is intelligently rethought in contemporary terms, and extensively developed. Yet, while the film is so beautiful to watch, we are far here from the 'lovely pictures' of *Snow Falling on Cedars*. Cuarón never sacrifices his actors to the achievement of visual pleasures. Actors, speech, actions, camera movement become aspects of a felt and realized whole.

I don't think the film is entirely successful: a flawed film with great sequences might be a fair summation. The problem is not that it is unfaithful to a celebrated original but rather the opposite: the Miss Havisham character (Anne Bancroft, doing her best with an unconvincing job) really doesn't work in the modern context and required much more drastic rethinking. Where the film most succeeds is where the Lean most failed: Hawke and Paltrow are a uniformly splendid match for Pip (or Finn, as he is renamed) and Estella (the only name carried over from Dickens) and they play to and against each other vividly. (In the scene where he first sketches her he reminds me, briefly, of the James Dean of *East of Eden*, though a more disciplined, less flamboyant Dean, whom, as Hamlet, he will later watch on television). Hawke makes the character so much his own that one cannot imagine anyone else in the role, the vulnerability and capacity for hurt that is so central to the Hawke 'presence' becoming the vivifying component in a fully thought and rounded characterization.

There is only one cinematic adaptation of 'Hamlet' that could be claimed as having the stature, as film, that the play has as theatre, and for that we must thank Kozintsev, Innocenti and Shostakovich: a breathtaking achievement. Almereyda's film makes no pretensions to such ambition. Its oddity is of course the use of Shakespeare's text (or numerous extracts thereof—it is surprising how much of the text survives) within a modern setting, other attempts to update 'Hamlet' (Ulmer, the Kaurismäki) being content to take over the basic plot, jettisoning the language and most of the play's complications. There is a great deal to be said and argued, not only about Hawke's Hamlet but about Almereyda's *Hamlet*.

Shakespeare remains one of my supreme touchstones of greatness, alongside Mozart (and, may his God bless him, Stravinsky—I hope all the angels in Heaven are at this



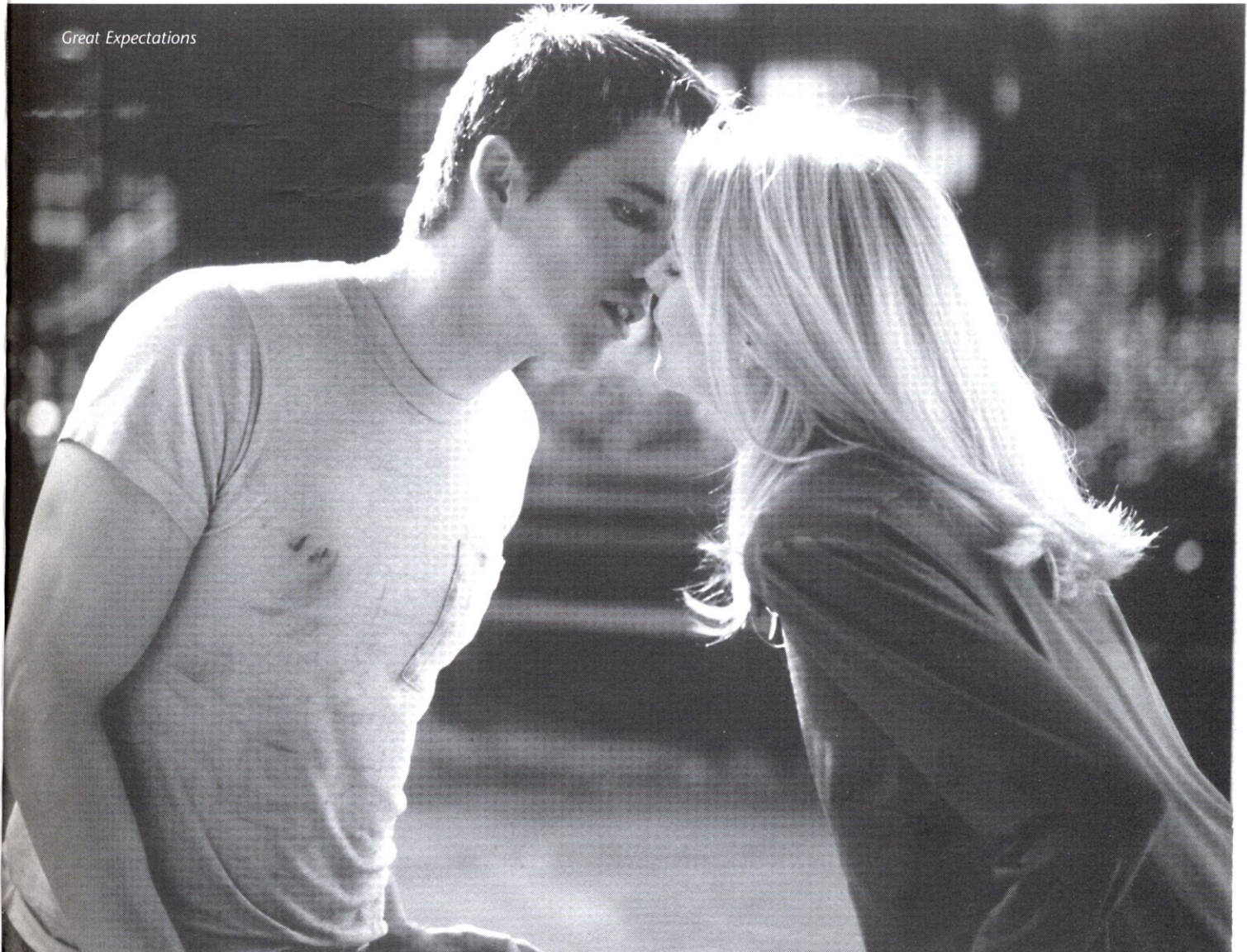
moment dancing to the *Danses Concertantes*). But I don't think Shakespeare is still 'alive' (as Mozart, possibly, and Stravinsky, certainly, is): I don't know how it is possible, today, to relate to Shakespeare, or even to understand him. My own commitment is to the endlessly fascinating, endlessly confusing texts, rather than to any actual theatrical or cinematic manifestations of them. Does anyone know, for example, how Shakespeare was spoken in his day? I suspect that, during the 18th and 19th centuries, his plays (as performed) underwent a pretty drastic transformation, the 18th adding selfconscious and stylized declamation, the 19th its own romanticism, as the audience changed from the cultural cross-section of Elizabethan times to the later awed but bored bourgeoisie. The 20th seems to have added, to all these incrustations, its own scepticism, pseudo-adoration, desperation and contempt: how else to explain the current obsession with transposing the plays into the most unlikely locations, periods and styles, all with a view to making them accessible to contemporary audiences and (as a necessary corollary) distracting them from the complexities of the text, which is the only thing of Shakespeare's we have, given that he almost never invented his own plots? To answer my own (earlier) question: I suspect that, in his own age, Shakespeare's texts (although in verse) were delivered on stage in a way that

made them immediately accessible to the general audience (everyone from Queen Elizabeth I down to the apparently enthusiastic 'lower classes', who may well have been her intellectual and moral superiors), and in a manner that minimized rather than exacerbated the difference between Shakespeare's verse and the way people actually conversed. And, yes, this is a prelude to arguing that Ethan Hawke's Hamlet is the best acted, the best spoken, so far, onscreen in the English (or American) language.

Shakespeare's plays were written to be spoken and acted, not read. As we can no longer experience them as they were incarnated on stage, all we have are the texts, our imagination and our common sense, none of which commodities it is likely that we share, in any easily recognizable form, with Shakespeare's contemporaries. And whatever is done with the plays, in theatre or cinema, they will still be there for us on paper: it is really pointless to cry 'Sacrilege!' or 'Betrayal!' when confronted with the latest misguided attempt at anachronistic novelty (neither, of course, are we compelled to admire it). As with the adaptation of a great novel, the only criterion is the quality and interest of the result.

I would agree with the traditional estimate that 'Hamlet', hopelessly incoherent, taking on issues quite beyond anything the plot allows, crowded with non sequiturs, absolute-

*Great Expectations*





ly demanding more thought, more discipline, remains one of the greatest plays ever written (rather as *La Règle du Jeu* is one of the greatest films): one may ask, for anyone alive today, whether it is possible to be both coherent and honest. Given Freud, does anyone know him or her self? Who among us is 'honest?' I don't think I am: like Hamlet, I can accuse myself of innumerable failings, including the usual self-serving dishonesties... Which is precisely the kind of thing that makes 'Hamlet' such an amazing play: its central crux—its central tragedy—is that Hamlet, in his blundering, clunky way, 'does the right thing', although, en route, he has been responsible (directly or indirectly) for the deaths of six innocent people ('innocent', at least, of murder—who is 'innocent', except

perhaps Ophelia?) and succeeds (having little awareness beyond his personal quandaries) only in instating a new, unknown and nondescript (since Fortinbras has no character) régime. Is this a 'sweet prince'? One of the many possible Hamlets (given the contradictions of Shakespeare's text) is not sweet in the least, and Horatio's valediction then becomes (intentionally or not, depending on the actor) ironic. These confusions are all intelligently present in Hawke's (or Almerayda's) Hamlet, translated into a contemporary context: How should we act, what should we do?. How, however incoherently, can we rebel against what the dominant order is doing to us? The question has never been more pressing, and in this sense 'Hamlet' and Hamlet are as alive

Hamlet





today as they have ever been. And so today, it seems to me, Shakespeare's text is 'up for grabs', it is there for people to use for their own purposes. Hamlet as an enacted play no longer exists: we have no clear idea how it was spoken. As a text it will exist as long as our civilization, or life on our planet, exists, which may not be all that much longer, given the current generally enthusiastic enactment of Freud's universal death wish.

The intelligence of Hawke's performance, and of Almereyda's film, can be highlighted by placing them beside the two most celebrated English-language screen Hamlets, **Olivier and Branagh**. Olivier's seems characterized predominantly by the actor's own inveterate narcissism: very much the Star, he surrounds himself with generally indifferent supporting players used as little more than setting for his jewel (and poor Jean Simmons, in a ridiculous blonde wig and one of her few forgettable performances—but she had to wait for Hollywood and Preminger for her full potential to be disclosed). His is the most selfconscious and self-serving of Hamlets. But if we describe Olivier's film as self-serving, what have we left to describe Branagh's? He takes the opposite course, surrounding himself with famous actors, as a result of which his own performance, such as it is, seems somewhat diminished and nondescript (I would be hard pressed to define just what he thinks Hamlet *is*, the interpretation lacking any clear centre). But the entire enterprise seems conceived so that Branagh the showman can overwhelm us with his prestige: 'Look, I can get all these great actors—Shakespeareans, Hollywood stars, famous comedians, you name it—and for the sake of appearing in my film they'll do humble walk-ons! *That's* what a grand fellow I've become. And for once we'll have every word of Shakespeare's text, so no one can accuse us of infidelity...' And so we're treated to distracting guest spots by everyone from Jack Lemmon through Charlton Heston and Gérard Depardieu to Billy Crystal. But the low point is surely when Branagh interrupts (visually) Heston's delivery of the Player King's speech (one of the film's highlights) to show us Sir John Gielgud and Dame Judi Dench staggering around in togas, without even a word to utter: surely among the most ludicrous and embarrassing moments the cinema has ever foisted upon us, as they are clearly there for no conceivable reason beyond the demonstration that Branagh can even command the services of knights and dames and then reduce them to ignominy. (What is amazing is that Julie Christie, Kate Winslet and Derek Jacobi manage to survive this four-hour débâcle with considerable honour, and if the film is worth seeing it is for them).

Set against these, Hawke's Hamlet seems to me exemplary. Shakespeare's poetry seems natural to him, as if he spoke like this every day (and, while the play is of course greatly abridged in the interest of coherence, almost all the lines are Shakespeare's, there being no attempt to modernize even when terms like 'king', 'queen', etc., are obviously inapplicable. The only exceptions are occasional contemporary interpolations, e.g. the voice of Eartha Kitt in the taxicab). He also delivers a coherent, complex and moving Hamlet (though its

relation to Shakespeare's is dubious). Almereyda surrounds him with an interesting and unexpected cast, none of whom has obvious associations with Shakespeare (the admirable Julia Stiles was the Shrew in *Ten Things I Hate About You*, but as that didn't use the text it really has nothing to do with Shakespeare, who seldom wrote his own plots). Hawke is of course 'the star' (as Hamlet must be), yet, as in all his best work, he never seeks to upstage anyone, never grabs the limelight, plays with his screen partners, so that the film emerges as another ensemble film, like *Reality Bites*. Hawke's is the least self-serving of Hamlets.

It would be misleading to describe Almereyda's film as a version of 'Hamlet'. More accurately, he uses Shakespeare's text for his own purposes, of which Shakespeare could never have dreamed: it must be seen not as Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' but as the Almereyda/Hawke *Hamlet*. It is a film about life within (and under) contemporary capitalism, with globalization clearly on the horizon: the dominance of corporations and 'business' is stressed at every point ('The Denmark Corporation', 'Hotel Elsinore') and if Hamlet is the hero it is by default, because he is a confused and neurotic dropout, in Yeats's unforgettable formulation 'a blind man battering blind men' within a world where suicide (the film makes perfect sense of the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy, Hamlet practising it on his video recorder before enunciating it in the 'Action' section of a Blockbuster store) seems a rational option. One of Hawke's most useful assets here is that (at the age of thirty) he can still play very young: no more of those middle-aged Hamlets who have somehow managed to get home from university for their father's funeral, this Hamlet is twenty at the outside, younger than Hawke seemed in *Gattaca*. No need here for explanations of Hamlet's delay in avenging his father's death (one recalls, with a shudder, Olivier's deadeningly portentous 'This is the Story...of a Man...who could not make up his mind'): if Hamlet senior (a deliberately unimposing Sam Shephard) was preferable to his younger usurper and murderer, it was not by that much, and a matter of degree rather than essence. (Nor is Fortinbras, who has already issued his challenge for corporate takeover at the film's commencement, going to be any improvement on Claudius). One of the most touching things in the film is Hawke's beautifully conveyed feelings of inadequacy when confronted with the ghost's commands, the film systematically paralleling this with Ophelia's helplessly ambivalent reaction to the demands of her father (and her subsequent deep shame and horror at having agreed to wear a tape recorder for her confrontation with Hamlet)—she, another dropout from the dominant culture, is clearly as torn and confused as Hamlet, her descent into madness being threatened from the outset. The central concern of the film is the bewilderment, and eventual destruction, of young people today by their elders and the heartless and bottomlessly corrupt world they have created.

#### Hawke and Linklater

I have stressed repeatedly Hawke's particular distinctiveness as a collaborative artist, which is why he is not a 'star' in the



sense in which Bette Davis (for example) was a star: there is no such thing as a Hawke 'vehicle', designed primarily to show off his talents, to which everything else is subordinated. His most fruitful collaboration to date has been with Richard Linklater, with whom he would seem to have a particular affinity. He has now appeared in four Linklater films, more or less—the 'less' applying to the fascinating *Waking Life*, which takes actors as its starting-point but in which the actual images are computer-generated. Of the remainder, *The Newton Boys* can be passed over quickly. It represented Linklater's attempt to break into the Hollywood mainstream without compromising himself—probably, today, a project doomed from the beginning. One gathers that the affair was not an entirely happy one: he had secured, as part of his contract, the right to final cut, so the film is his own, and certainly nothing to be ashamed of. But he was bombarded with 'suggestions' from the management (which he bravely ignored) and the film was thrown away by its producers, in these days when everything seems to depend upon advertising. There remains the question of the project, surely a compromise: it fits with Linklater's already fully developed anti-establishment ethos, but also fits (less neatly) with the contemporary demand for 'action' movies. Its relative failure at the box-office can be ascribed not merely to halfhearted promotion but to the fact that this is an 'action' movie in which no one gets killed and there are no noticeable special effects. One wonders whether Linklater has quite assessed the degree of corruption of the contemporary youth audience to which the film was evidently addressed. Its interest here is that it gave Hawke the chance to shine in comedy, for virtually the first time since *Mystery Date*, his excellence even noticed by the mainstream media.

I must also pass briefly over *Before Sunrise*, but only because I have already written at some length about that extraordinary and magical film (*CineAction* 41). It is one of those rare films that is unimaginable without its particular director, screenwriter and actors: one of the great collaborative works of cinema, and an instance of one version of what we call 'pure cinema' because it couldn't conceivably be reproduced in any other medium, its 'meaning' being essentially the interaction among the participants in front of and behind the camera. It brings to the foreground a crucial issue raised by Hawke's work, which happens also to be the subject of his first novel 'The Hottest State', published around the same time the film was being made: the renegotiation, in the aftermath of the 60s/70s Women's Movement, of heterosexual relationships. That the film was very personal to Hawke is not to be doubted; the novel needs to be read in relation to it. He and Julie Delpy give performances of exquisite delicacy and nuance, playing to each other with an intimacy and mutual sensitivity one seldom encounters in the cinema. And it represents one of the most complete manifestations of that central component of the Hawke persona, vulnerability, and the various resources for dealing with it.

Linklater's latest film, *Tape*, is something else again, representing a significant extension of his own and Hawke's work to date, growing out of yet adding to what has gone before.

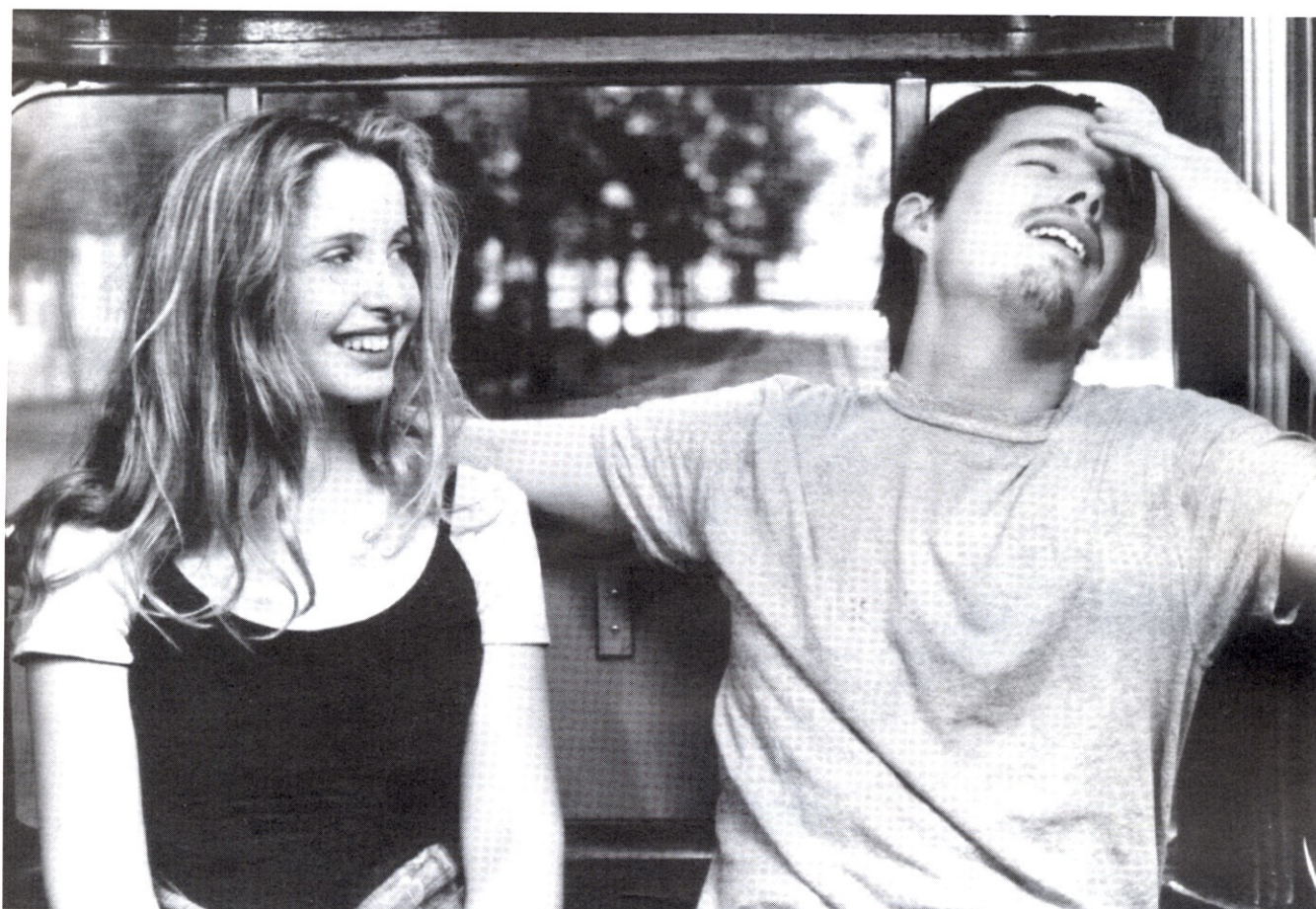
Certainly it is Hawke's most extreme performance (he goes, as Linklater himself says, 'to some new level here'). Made a year after *Hamlet*, he looks ten years older; the self-defensive aggression, abrasiveness, even viciousness, that in previous roles have lurked beneath the disarming niceness, the sensitivity and vulnerability, here burst out, become the dominant characteristics, allowed full expression for the first time in his career. He gives us a character who lives in constant pain and tension, disguised beneath anger and provocation.

Given Linklater's extensive and intensive knowledge (and love) of classical Hollywood movies, I found myself wondering, as I watched, whether he thought of Howard Hawks when he was shooting *Tape*. Hawks returned in his films repeatedly to what he himself called, apparently 'innocently', the 'love story between two men'—a 'love story' of which the erotic/sexual implications have continuously to be denied. The woman's role in the relevant films (notably *A Girl in Every Port*, *The Big Sky*, *El Dorado*, spanning his entire career) becomes somewhat ignominious (though Hawks's women always have plenty of vitality), her primary function being to validate the heroes' heterosexuality. *Tape* (which could equally be described as 'a love story between two men', the love becoming almost indistinguishable from hate) can be read as the dark underside of the Hawksian syndrome, mercilessly illuminating those areas that Hawks concealed (as much from himself as from his audience) in a darkness into which we were forbidden to penetrate, no questions asked. Another, more obvious, thematic touchstone is *Raging Bull*: the buddy-buddy greeting between Hawke and Robert Sean Leonard at the beginning of the film, expressed in an exchange of hugs and violent punches, instantly recalls Jake la Motta's 'I don't know whether to fuck him or fight him'.

The film's essential theme, then, is the repression of a natural homoeroticism, the constant male dread of its return, and the damaging consequences (for both men and women) of its repression, which problematizes both heterosexual and homosexual relationships by denying the 'constitutional bisexuality' that Freud deduced we are born with: especially, the necessity for many men of developing a false, potentially violent and destructive, machoism as defence and denial. Both the men in the film are affected by this—indeed, it's gradually revealed as the determining influence on their behaviour, towards each other and towards women—though to differing degrees. In Vince (Hawke) it is more obviously dangerous, the repression ('What is repressed must always return'), manifesting itself in an almost continuous tendency to violence, physical or emotional (we ask ourselves, 'Does this guy never rest, is he never at peace?'), even while he repeatedly displays himself as 'object for the gaze'. Tom (Leonard), the less obviously damaged, feels much less need for overt demonstrations of his 'masculinity', the inevitable assertion of heterosexual 'manhood' taking a subtler (and even more disturbing) form: his belief (obviously sincere, impressed upon him as 'memory') that he raped Amy (Uma Thurman) in high school, a 'fact' that she convincingly denies.

Thurman appears only in the film's last half hour, but her





*Before Sunrise*

role is crucial, and marvellously realized. When, at the end of the film, she definitively and consciously opts out (where the parallel Hawks women were either rejected or marginalized), leaving the two guys together in various states of collapse, it is clear that she is the only one of the three who understands what is going on beneath the surface, and rightly wants no part in it.

Hawke's acceptance (not to mention brilliant realization) of this role at this stage of his career, in a film that will inevitably find only a limited, 'alternative' audience (based on a play, the action is restricted to a single nondescript room, and the subject-matter is not exactly calculated to appeal to teenagers as 'date' material), stands as further evidence of the seriousness and integrity with which he has pursued a career in film that has meaning beyond box-office receipts and celebrity status within the media. No film prior to this has used so eloquently his physicality, his potential edginess, and he has never before looked as ugly as he does in certain close-ups.

What, finally, are we interested in when we become involved, as critics, with a particular star/ persona/person? I don't know. And I think 'I don't know' might become a watchword for anyone else who undertakes a project like this. Obviously, there must be something personal, which

should not be concealed: yes, I think I have been attracted to Hawke's work for personal reasons, because, on a certain level, I identify with him—I have tried to bring a certain dignity, a certain integrity, to my work, as he has to his, in an age that doesn't exactly encourage this, Ethan Hawke being one of the rare contemporary (and therefore highly vulnerable) 'stars' who has not at any stage of his career prostituted himself. In an age dominated by 'image construction' he seems never to have gone out of his way to draw attention to himself, and if one can talk at all of a Hawke 'image' it is not of the kind we see plastered over the tabloids, but one requiring careful and scrupulous definition. In this period, when mainstream American cinema, dominated by profit-calculating corporations with no interest in the production of distinguished work or the development of distinguished careers, when even the most promising of stars—Harrison Ford, Brendan Fraser, even Denzel Washington—succumb to the pervasive banality and emptiness, taking 'safe' roles in 'safe' projects, no risks attached, Ethan Hawke deserves far more credit than he has been given for the intelligence and integrity with which he continues to pursue the career of a serious and dedicated artist. If not all his choices have been fortunate, none has been dishonourable.

As I write, Hawke's second novel is about to be published, and his first film as director is about to be released.



# FRANK AND FEARLESS


## THE EVE ARNOLD-JOAN CRAWFORD SESSIONS

'...love and eternal trust always'

—from Joan to Eve, *Eve Arnold: In Retrospect*

by **Florence Jacobowitz**  
and **Richard Lippe**

Eve Arnold photographed Joan Crawford in 1959 in Los Angeles and New York City, and the results were intended to help launch Crawford's return to filmmaking with *The Best of Everything* (1959) after an absence of several years. The film, directed by Jean Negulesco and based on a best-selling novel by Rona Jaffe, was designed primarily to be a showcase for a number of 20th Century Fox's young contract players. Arnold had previously worked with Crawford on an assignment for *Woman's Home Companion*, in conjunction with the promoting of Robert Aldrich's *Autumn Leaves* (1956). In her book, *Eve Arnold: In Retrospect*, Arnold elaborates on their first encounter, which did not lead to the publication of any photographs, although Crawford was pleased with



Portrait still. MGM  
—the mid-thirties



Arnold's work. More significantly, the encounter established the beginnings of a relationship based on trust. Arnold recounts her initial impressions of Crawford's idiosyncrasies, and the self-absorbed Hollywood star who was very conscious of her public image. Despite this awareness, Arnold also acknowledges that it wasn't until years later that she began to understand the complexities underlying the star's behaviour. At any rate, it was Arnold's suggestion that initiated the assignment for *Life* magazine, to do a photo essay to help publicize Crawford's participation in *The Best of Everything*.

Eve Arnold, an established photojournalist and member of the Magnum Photo Agency, had worked previously with other Hollywood stars, most notably Marlene Dietrich and Marilyn Monroe. In many respects the Crawford sessions are continuous with a number of concerns Arnold pursued with these other female stars; but it is also evident that the Crawford photographs are clearly stamped by the star's personality. Arnold's work is remarkable in the way she respects and understands her subjects and their individuality. She is an artist who can work collaboratively with a strong subject who has a commanding presence and identity. Arnold's training as a photojournalist invites a level of observation and detachment as well as a commitment to authenticity. At the same time her empathetic understanding of the gender concerns being addressed allows for a personal engagement which is expressed in the photographs. Arnold's work contains too a marked narrative component and she elicits a performance from her star subjects, however intimate and revealing. These elements contribute to making her photographs function as self-reflexive and self-examining analyses of stardom, the conditions of glamour, the 'invisibility' of work and professional investment. The photographs can be seen as meditations on women professionals in the public domain of entertainment, an area which demands a commodifying of the self. Arnold's works could easily slip into parody, or exploitive journalistic tabloid-like presentations of the underside and secrets of stardom. Instead, they are careful contemplative visual essays that maintain at their base, a profound respect and understanding of the tensions and contradictions inherent in socially empowered women.

By the time Arnold photographed Joan Crawford in 1959, the star had become a legend in decline. Crawford had a long film career, beginning as a starlet in the mid-1920s at MGM. Her career accelerated in the early 1930s because of her popularity, the critical acclaim her work received in *Grand Hotel* (1932) and her ambition, as illustrated by her taking on the role of Sadie Thompson in *Rain* (1932). In a film such as *Possessed* (1931), Crawford played a lower-class woman who struggled to survive, resorting to prostitution and having eventually to deal with the consequences of her actions. This narrative trajectory is common to the 1930s melodrama: *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise* (1931), *Blonde Venus* (1932), *Red-Headed Woman* (1932), all address the woman as prostitute. However, the distinction with the Crawford films is that her image becomes increasingly concerned with attaining respect through class mobility. Unlike Garbo and Dietrich, who project innate elegance, Crawford must construct herself as a woman with class, and the result is a display of the product produced through attention to accoutrements and

detail. Crawford was employed by MGM from 1925 to 1943, a studio which cultivated an image of wealth and prestige. Crawford embraced MGM's aura of glamour and elegance for as long as it lasted. Her marriages to Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., considered Hollywood royalty (1929–33), and Franchot Tone, a 'serious' actor from the New York stage (1935–39), gave her respectability and solidified her position of class and status within Hollywood and the mainstream press. A number of her late 1930s melodramas, such as Frank Borzage's *Mannequin* (1937), reinforce Crawford's iconic image of the woman who rises to the top and succeeds, fueled by her tenacity and determination.

Joan Crawford is most notably photographed in the 1930s by George Hurrell and Clarence S. Bull, head of MGM's stills department and now referred to as 'the man who shot Garbo'. In *The Hurrell Style*, the photographer says, "Joan Crawford was, for many years, the most photogenic of the Hollywood group of actresses"; and, when he goes on to comment on their rapport, notes that Crawford committed herself tirelessly to being photographed. Hurrell's signature style creates an image of dramatic glamour that utilizes the angular lines of Crawford's face. In the 1930s, Joan Crawford embodies the ultimate fantasy of a star who begins at the bottom and makes it to the top. Crawford's image is, on the one hand, the hard-working woman who earns her rewards, however she is also a glamour queen, who epitomizes artifice, style and a constructed beauty. Although 1930s' Hollywood stars like Garbo and Dietrich were goddesses, sexualized, exotic and not quotidian, Crawford's popular image is tied to her American working-class humble beginnings. She represents democratic possibility, resilience, the notion that in America, anyone with ambition who works at it can achieve glamour and success. Her aggressiveness and drive contribute to a masculine edge that is implicit in the persona, underlined visually by her physical presence and her face, which communicates strength and assertion. In the 1930s, the close-up shot was used to emphasize the face, which became the locus of perfection, mystery, elegance and sexuality. In the earlier part of the decade, Crawford's face was softened by youth and a kind of vulnerability, as is seen in *Grand Hotel*. By the late 1930s, her on-screen image, with George Cukor's *The Women* (1939), becomes markedly confrontational. Her tenacity and unwillingness to be discarded easily tends to problematise her femininity.

From Cukor's *A Woman's Face* (1941) onwards, Crawford becomes increasingly split between a masculinized and feminized self. In part this can be related indirectly to the impact of the war years. Glamour becomes more democratized and casual, a less refined version of femininity which expands to include engagement in the everyday world of the workplace, the war effort and so forth. Michael Curtiz's *Mildred Pierce* (1945) was produced by Warner Brothers, a studio which identified itself as egalitarian and socially aware, producing entertainment for the masses. Although Curtiz wanted Barbara Stanwyck and the studio initially offered the role to Bette Davis, Crawford rightly saw the character and the film as a means to revive her waning career. Crawford's Mildred is heightened by the actress's own intensity, sense of purpose and need; these characteristics are underlined visually through her physiognomy which is highly masculinized (the square shoulders, the set, hardened face, the eradication of





*Mildred Pierce* (1945). Crawford and Jack Carson

softness). Physically and visually she overpowers her lover Monty/Zachary Scott. Mildred's business success is motivated in part by her maternal instincts to offer her daughters every benefit; however, she sublimates her own frustration and unhappiness through her zealous commitment to her daughters' future. The potential gender subversion is diffused by Crawford's allegiance to the heterosexual couple and family, despite her failure to find a suitable partner. Around this time, Crawford herself adopts children and publicizes her identity as a single mother/movie star earning a living to support her family. As a single working parent, Crawford becomes both mother and father, but she still aspires to conventional ideological notions of fulfillment which include finding a husband. In 1955, Crawford married for the fourth time. She wed Alfred Steele, then president of Pepsi Cola and gained a husband who offered her the role of wife and a position of power through her subsequent involvement in the

Pepsi Cola corporation. The marriage ended in 1959 when Steele died of a heart attack. After his death, Crawford discovered that during their marriage, Steele spent lavishly and went heavily into debt, leaving her in financial ruin.

Crawford's move to Warners in the mid-1940s and her success with *Mildred Pierce* (she won her first nomination and Academy Award) sustained her career through the rest of the decade. The Academy Award was a legitimization of Crawford's professionalism, talent and a public recognition of her hard work and determination. Crawford, reinventing herself as a working mother when glamour was beyond her range, displayed her adaptability and, hence, survival skills. By the early 1950s, her career again was on the decline, in part because she was now an aging actress who had stretched what she could offer to the limit. In the post-war period, Hollywood, following the cultural trends, moved away from the patent artifice and glamour of the pre-war era.



Crawford resisted this change, attacking younger stars such as Marilyn Monroe for developing a persona lacking in class, sophistication and professionalism. She was dismissive of Monroe's uninhibited sexuality and admission that she embraces her sexual self. Crawford regarded a more naturalized style as a cheapening of the star's status and aura of uniqueness. She fetishised her responsibility to her image and maintained the traditional studio's concept of the star as extraordinary, and a perfected entity. Crawford's maintenance of an idealized image went beyond grooming, demanding the cultivation of a lifestyle that reflected this notion.

Before leaving Warners, Crawford, on loan out to Columbia, made *Harriet Craig* (1950). As Harriet Craig, Crawford played an obsessive wife who alienates her husband through her extreme fetishistic behaviour. The role fed into the off-screen image she cultivated of being compulsive about cleanliness and heavily regimented in behavioural patterns. Like Harriet Craig, Crawford consistently refused to accept middle ground: her over-extending personality took everything to an extreme. (In Roy Newquist's *Conversations with Joan Crawford*, she says the role was one with which women could identify.) In her first post-Warners film, *Sudden Fear* (1952), a thriller/melodrama, her character is a rich, professionally successful and self-sufficient woman who allows herself, because of loneliness and vulnerability, to be seduced by a younger man (Jack Palance), who wants to kill her to get her money. She won her third Academy Award nomination (the second was for the 1947 *Possessed*) and continued to freelance, doing a musical/melodrama, *Torch Song* (1953) at MGM, and then Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* (1954), a Western/melodrama in which she plays a woman who has survived professionally and personally by sheer willpower and drive. As Vienna, a woman abandoned by her lover, who has sold herself to build a 'respectable' business as a saloon owner, Crawford's masculine/feminine duality is made literal and accentuated in the film; in order to keep alive and hold on to her business, she has become a gunslinger, a masculine image, but her primary desire remains to find fulfillment as a heterosexual woman. This attempt to live out conflicting gender roles places a credibility strain on both her characterization and the narrative itself.

In many of her film roles of the 1940s onward, Crawford's attempt to secure both power and heterosexual love earns her a steady stream of abuse and loss. The wants of the women she plays set up a masochistic cycle of punishment. Like her on-screen counterparts, Crawford herself seemed unaware of the tensions and contradictions her aspirations generated. On the one hand, she enjoyed her empowerment as a professional and a famous, glamorous woman; but she also wanted to cultivate an image of feminine success that depended on being compliant, maternal, unambitious.

In many ways, *The Best of Everything* addresses the tensions inherent in the Crawford persona in a very direct way. Although Crawford has a supporting role in the film, she remains emblematic of the result of wanting 'the best of everything', and the potential price one pays. Crawford plays Amanda Farrow, a middle-aged executive in a New York City-based, high profile book-publishing company who, over a number of years, has risen above the female secretarial pool at the base of the structure to the priv-

ileged position of editor, a traditionally male job. Amanda has earned a reputation with the younger women as being a demanding bitch, lacking in compassion. The firm's senior executive, Fred Shalimar/Brian Aherne, respects Amanda's professionalism as an editor and they share a mutual unspoken understanding of aging, loneliness and sexuality. Although the Hope Lange, Suzy Parker and Diane Baker characters are the focus of the story, which concerns their choices in terms of establishing a career or finding 'true love', Crawford's Amanda remains an overriding presence that resonates. She is, at first, an adversary who embodies a negative option: success achieved at the price of being a hardened, ostracized woman who, to feel desirable, has resorted to accepting a weekly liaison with a married man. Hope Lange's Caroline Bender is pitted against Amanda Farrow: as a young sophisticated college graduate, she wants to achieve her professional success while rewriting the traditional scenario that demands the denial of emotional attachments.

Although Amanda is tough, she is never treated as a stereotype to be dispensed with. In fact, she realizes that Gregg Adams/Suzy Parker lacks the talent to succeed as a stage actor, but she still attempts to help her by introducing her to the theatrical director David Savage/Louis Jourdan. As for Caroline, while seeing her as an ambitious rival, Amanda maintains a kind of mentor relationship with her and never sabotages or undermines her credibility. The complexity of the character and the broader implications in terms of gender, power and a professional identity with which Amanda Farrow struggles is nuanced and deepened by Crawford's on and off screen persona by this point in her career. She was, by that time, identified as an executive of a corporation as well as an aging movie star, and had by then her share of marital and familial problems. Amanda, as the narrative develops, decides to take up a marriage proposal from an old suitor and leaves her role as full-time executive and part-time mistress in order to be a 'normal' woman—the socially sanctioned, small town housewife. She soon returns to the company, admitting that the attempt to alter her life didn't work out; it is too late for her to change. Caroline cedes the executive position she took from Amanda back to her, learning from her experience that making a serious attempt at a marriage (before it becomes too late to do so) is the way to getting 'the best of everything'. The film ultimately is not sure what is possible for women and cannot cope with the issues it has raised. Its ideological confusions regarding women's ability to negotiate careers with personal lives and needs is marked by the film's ending: one of the three women has died, another has suffered for her naiveté and the third is frightened into settling for a man for whom she has no passion. The film's emotional core is Crawford's Amanda because she represents the pathos of a woman who has transgressed gender norms and can no longer find an identity outside the workplace that will offer gratifications. By its conclusion, the film treats Crawford /Amanda Farrow with a certain amount of grace and respect which it could easily have denied her. *The Best of Everything* essentially addresses its concerns with a sensitivity and an implicit understanding of the impossibility of finding resolution to a deeply entrenched dilemma.

Eve Arnold's sessions with Joan Crawford in 1959 speak of issues found in *The Best of Everything*. Arnold observes the per-



sona and perceptively presents the contradictions and difficulties that it embodies. Crawford has enjoyed social status through her various careers as actress, off-screen celebrity, and executive, and is aware that aging erodes one's marketability and public desirability. The images taken at these sessions are contemplative but also remarkably bold, confrontational and fearless in the degree and insistence on Crawford's part to expose herself and the struggles inherent in her situation. In *Eve Arnold: In Retrospect*, Arnold suggests she was taken aback by the star and her behaviour in their initial meeting in the mid- 1950s. Arnold comments on Crawford's public spectacles and the tensions with her daughter, Christina. Crawford's insistence on playing the star in public, making the grand entrance, blowing kisses to the audience and holding up a theatrical performance as she takes her seat, astounded Arnold. By the late 1950s, Arnold had enough exposure to celebrity to better understand the excesses of the star and her image, and to place them within a context of Crawford's efforts to survive as a public persona in a culture that doesn't value older women, however professional, talented or experienced. Arnold also recounts her final encounter with Crawford, which took place in England in the late 1960s. Crawford was in the country filming the horror film, *Trog* (1970), and Arnold, concerned with the ignominiousness of the situation, tried to interest the press in a photo shoot to publicize Crawford and the film, but by that time no one cared enough to take up the offer. Arnold notes that Crawford maintained her professional attitude without indulging in self-pity, accepting the fact that, in order to financially survive, she had to take on projects unworthy of her talent and status.

Joan Crawford's last major film was Robert Aldrich's *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962), a film that uses the horror genre as a means of contemplating the grotesqueness of aging women as well as the demise of the Hollywood studio system and its concept of stardom. The film can be seen as a post-*Psycho* horror film dealing with the familial tensions between two eccentric and disabled sisters bound together in a perverse situation, but it also functions as a meditation on the film medium and its various powers. Baby Jane /Bette Davis and Blanche/Joan Crawford, each in an advanced state of decline, evoke and comment on the classical Hollywood cinema and notions of youth, the glamorous star, opulence, and the empowered studio machinery which produced illusionism. The scene in which Blanche, immobilized in her wheelchair, delighting in watching one of her 1930s films revived on television, draws attention to the distance between her past and present, but also acknowledges the magic of the cinema to permanently mark and preserve an image of perfection in a perpetual 'nowness'. In the film, the revival of Blanche's films and the attention she receives infuriates Baby Jane, whose career as a child star in vaudeville, a form of live entertainment, is permanently lost to memory.

*What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* markets two older film stars, Davis and Crawford, as being displaced by both the contemporary cinema and the social stigma age carries, particularly for women. The pathos of the film is generated by these issues. But, ultimately, *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* is a film of contradiction. There is an awareness of the pathos which the material produces; but, on the other hand, the film is offering a horror

film-cum-black comedy that is structured by a series of shocking moments and the idea that the aging star is inherently monstrous. The excess of Crawford's and Davis's roles in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* feeds into a reading of the film as parody or camp. Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) is the film that introduced the theme of the grotesqueness of the no longer young and desirable movie queen; unlike its treatment of Gloria Swanson, Aldrich's film evidences some compassion for the two women. They are also presented as being emblematic of a system of filmmaking that itself was changing. Their presences in the film speak of a sense of loss for a system that was focused, coherent, and potentially aesthetically rich.

Joan Crawford represented a notion of stardom that demanded an intense commitment from the star to her public, and the awareness that stardom continues off-screen and is dependent on public interest in order to maintain its value. Crawford's private life, fully displayed after her death in 1977 by the publication of Christina Crawford's sensationalistic *Mommie Dearest* (1978) and the subsequent 1981 film version featuring Faye Dunaway, reinforced the problematic aspects of Crawford's image. *Mommie Dearest* has usurped Crawford's star persona, incorporating aspects of the working professional who privileged her image over her family and distorted her off-screen identity as a caring ideal mother. Regardless of Christina Crawford's reasons for writing the book, it feeds the ideological notion that a woman's desire to succeed in both the social world and the private, domestic one leads to punishment and ridicule.

The images taken during the Arnold-Crawford 1959 sessions shot in Los Angeles and New York City cover various aspects of stardom, ranging from exposing/foregrounding the process involved in shaping the image (and icon), to the product produced, the glamorous, perfected image. (Richard Dyer's *Heavenly Bodies* features on its cover an Arnold mirror shot of Crawford taken during the 1959 New York City sessions which pointedly comments on the perfected image, its projection and implicit dissemination). One aspect of the photographs taken during these sessions is the range of the Crawford image to be addressed and circulated. The roles include: the actress (reading a script); the working executive (the Pepsi Cola board meeting); the housewife (mopping a floor). The problem of aging complicates the various identities being enacted and underlines a battle or struggle to stay the damages of aging. Many of the New York City shots taken during her beauty treatments are shocking in their directness and degree of exposure. Few established personalities would offer this kind of public revelation, and Crawford's desire and willingness to do so speaks of her belief that her public should be aware of the tremendous investment the star makes in creating an image of buffed perfection. It is unlikely that Crawford read this as an attempt to confront or shock; the photographs were intended to be taken as illustrating a process of which the end result would be viewed as admirable and attractive. The stages of beautification do, nonetheless, reveal more than intended, and are disturbing. Arnold's intense close-ups offer a detailed scrutiny and cross the line between the public and the private. Significantly, in the heyday of the classical Hollywood studios, the images circulated were carefully controlled and refrained from revealing



too closely the work involved in making a star's body appear beautiful - the idea was that the star's beauty was ever present and inherent in the persona.

The fascination of these photographs lies not merely in their shock effect. Beyond the surprise of their revealing nature, they provide extraordinary commentary on the personal and social demands integral to creating and sustaining beauty, glamour and the appearance of agelessness. These photographs demand the contemplation of the work involved that precedes the final moment. Their power is also tied up with mortality, inevitable decay and the difficulty of adjusting to age in a culture that fetishizes youth and freshness. The star's (and the public's) insistence on preserving a perfected image exacerbates these issues; ultimately there is great pathos in this struggle. In some ways the star's greatest challenge was to remain the same, to maintain an image captured on film which defies aging and time itself. This dilemma continues beyond the demise of classical Hollywood; aging and the loss of youthful beauty remains women's greatest fear and the services available to battle this loss continue to proliferate.

The photographs straddle a number of concerns Crawford wished to address, the professional woman exposing the labour-intensive process of beautification, the pride she took in maintaining her shape. The photographs subtly include evidence of the varied support staff, such as the masseuse and dressmaker, that contribute to this process. The intimacy of some of the images humanizes Crawford - it is a job and in part women are being asked to acknowledge the effort of the labour. We have chosen two diverse photographs from these sessions as representative of the concerns Joan Crawford and Eve Arnold reveal in these remarkable images.

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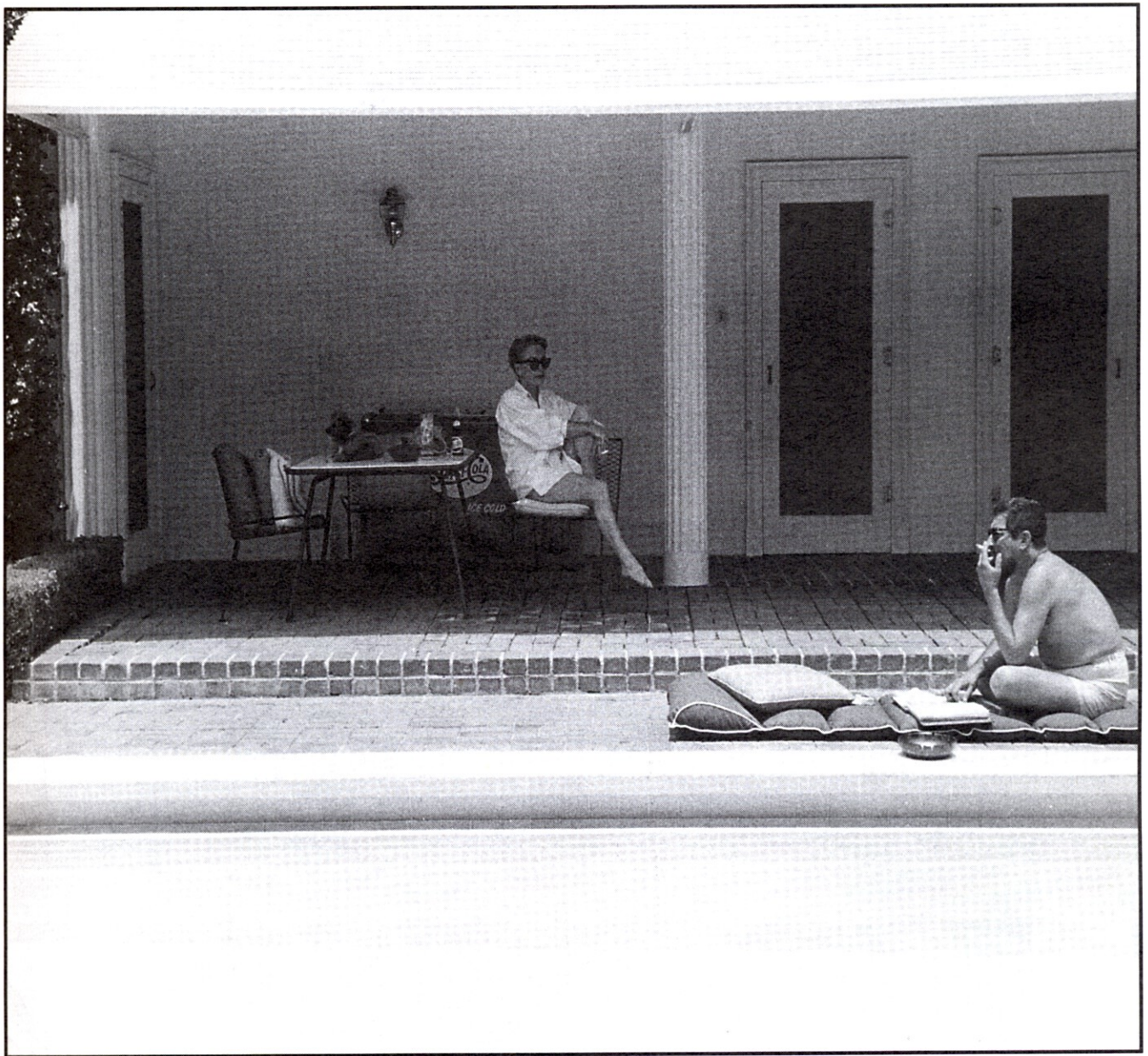


*The Best of Everything* (1959). Crawford as Amanda Farrow.



We have chosen this photograph entitled 'Joan Crawford sitting by the pool,' 1959, because of its distinctive character. It is uncharacteristic of the Crawford image, which is usually more responsive, confrontational and aware of the camera. The image may be more reflective of Eve Arnold's vision than Crawford's. It functions as a photojournalistic shot of the star, in long shot in the shade; she is posing (the pointed toe, the exposed leg) but manages to look casual in her white, loose-fitting shirt and sunglasses and appears as an elegant, sensual and relaxed presence. Crawford is a vision of an attractive mature woman, at ease with herself and her surroundings. This empowers her and gives her a kind of beauty which isn't available to a youthful star. The photograph is marked by Crawford's presence, but she doesn't dominate or overwhelm it. She is positioned so that her body forms a diagonal with the man seated in the foreground in the sun; the width of the image and the whiteness that frames the top and bottom opens the image up and contributes to its airiness and serenity. The setting in a private manicured home, by the patio abutting a pool, speaks of Los Angeles and star privilege, but it is a pared-down, uncluttered environment. An accoutrement of 1950s stardom, the miniature poodle on the table, which appears curiously to be looking in the same direction as the man on the mat, reaffirms Crawford's luxurious lifestyle. The partially obscured Pepsi Cola-labeled fridge and the bottle of Pepsi on the table reference her connection to the product but in an unobtrusive manner, in keeping with the graceful tone of the setting. The photograph catches a moment in time without pretense, without seeming forced. Arnold's use of light and shadow, space and subject placement gives the impression of an image that is both naturalistic and composed. The photograph intriguingly also suggests, with its combination of a studied casualness and formal precision, a still taken on a studio set peopled with two actors about to play a scene, the presentation of a narrative moment. This image shares much of the same sensibility of Arnold's well-known shot of Marilyn Monroe contemplating her script on the set of *The Misfits*. It illustrates Arnold's respect for and understanding of the meaning of star presence, within a relaxed humanist perspective.





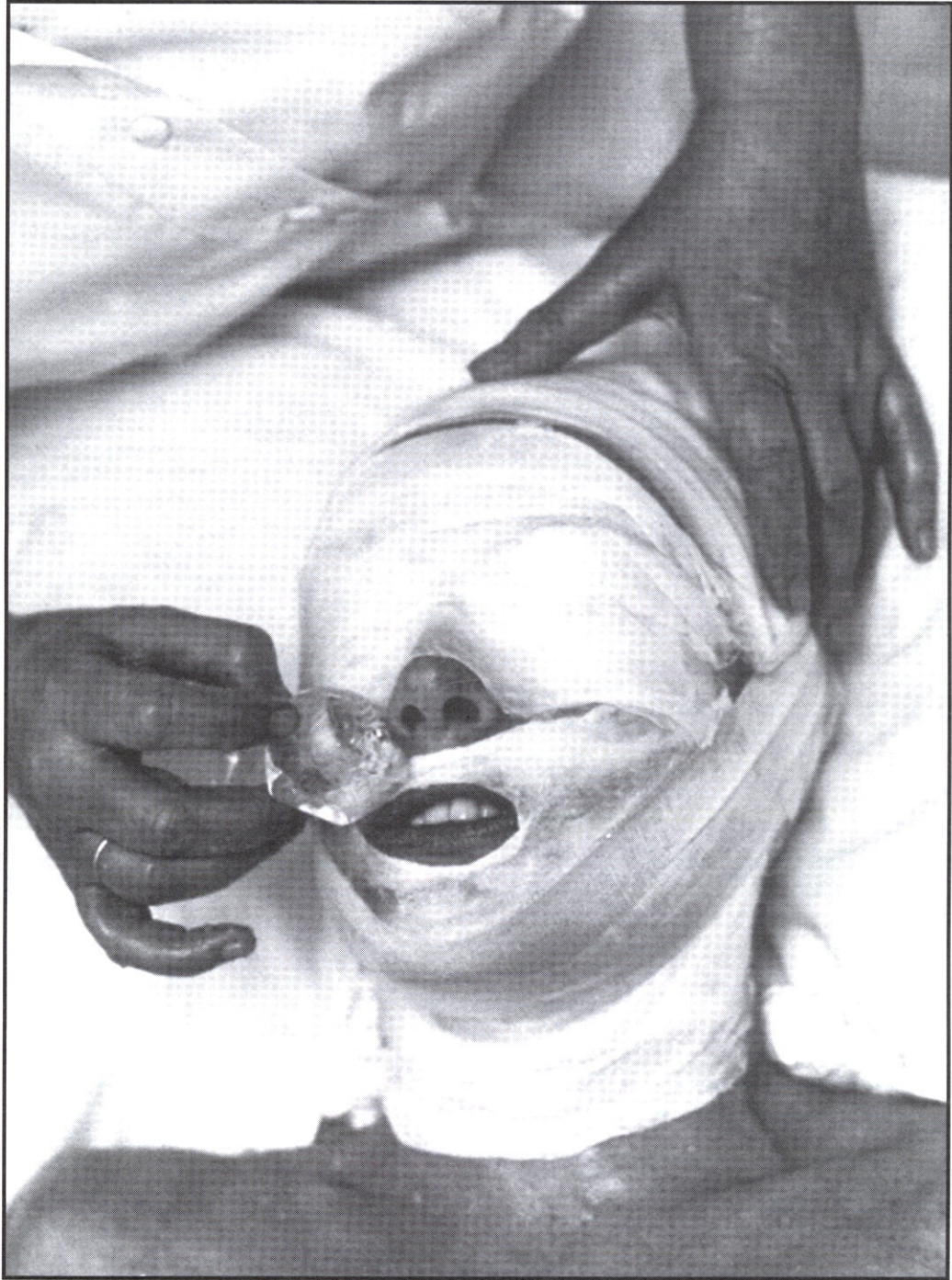


This image, taken also in a session in Los Angeles in 1959, is part of a series of revelatory moments designed to foreground the process of beautification, the 'work' involved in creating a glamorous star image. Amongst the most controversial of these, is a number of intimate close-up shots of Crawford undergoing a facial treatment. The shots vary; the most extreme is a shot of her face and neck almost totally bandaged while ice is being applied. In one shot, the head is wrapped and hands belonging to a barely visible beautician are massaging cream into the temples. In another, Crawford's hands hold compresses which are covering her eyes; on her head she wears a decorative hair net. The bandaged image has a surreal quality to it, evoking the horror-like intensity of Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1959). The image conveys both mortality and mummification, the ice cube being applied suggests preservation; it also alludes eerily to cosmetic surgery. (The echoes of the image include Crawford's facial operation and its aftermath in George Cukor's *A Woman's Face*.) The image is shocking, because, among other things, it extends well beyond any notion of a 'candid' shot of a private moment in Crawford's beauty care.

The surreality of the image is a result of both Crawford's head seeming to be disembodied and the erasure of two of her most characteristic features, the eyes and the eyebrows. There remains only the distinctive mouth and the nostrils. In addition, the close detail of the image gives the ice cube and the gauze particularly a tactile quality, taking on a concreteness the face no longer possesses.

This image, however provocative and confrontational, does not read as parody nor is it presented as being sensationalistic or exploitive. It differs from an image solely intended to shock and disturb; the intensity of the close-up undermines a detached response, and invites a more meditative intimate one. These rituals of women's beautifying regimes are not unfamiliar, but remain in the realm of private space and an experience carried out behind closed doors. Crawford's desire to have photographs from these sessions published in *Life* magazine can be seen as speaking of her sense of professionalism. She was no longer the young woman; she was established and secure in her identity, well understood the importance of maintaining contact with her public, and obviously had confidence in Arnold's professional abilities. It is conceivable also that Crawford possibly saw the publication of more intimate and extreme photographs as a means to obtain attention-getting publicity. In any case, the photographs' lasting value resides in the intelligence and aesthetic sensibility Eve Arnold brought to the construction of these images. It is Arnold's creativity that provides the images with a complex meaning, giving them a resonance that extends far beyond Crawford's initial purpose for having the pictures taken. These photographs were, in 1959, and remain today, audacious works. The images are some of Arnold's most radical photographs, not only because of their boldness but because of the fine balance the images achieve; the photographs indicate that Arnold's work here extends beyond photojournalism. These images are personal, provocative and committed to demystifying the whole question of gender as construction, and the social ramifications of women and their self-image.







# PLAYING FATHERS AND MONSTERS

## THE CLASSICAL APPEAL OF ANTHONY HOPKINS

Anthony Hopkins is now sixty-three years old and has for the last decade enjoyed a cult popularity and iconic status transcending age and gender. Given his remarkable screen charisma, it is worth considering our particular attraction to one of the greatest actors of our time. He has portrayed presidents, tycoons, scientists, artists and warriors. Most famously and definitively, he has incarnated the psychopathic, cannibalistic serial killer, Dr. Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) and *Hannibal* (Ridley Scott, 2001). Perhaps the primary appeal of Anthony Hopkins lies in his extraordinary ability at playing symbolic fathers and patrician 'monsters.'

From psychological thrillers to historical dramas, from Hollywood mainstream cinema to art-house literary adaptations, from Hannibal Lecter to Titus Andronicus, Hopkins reveals an understanding of the mythic nature of fatherhood.

He understands how fathers may seduce and terrify us and how they may disenchant us. Hopkins' roles thus achieve a mythic character and it is the classical and often pathological power of many of his performances which resonate. His roles invariably explore hegemonic and extreme masculinity and many concern timeless themes of power, violence, madness and romance. While they reflect contrasting types of male sexuality, from the erotically predatory Picasso to the withdrawn celibate

by **Rachael Johnson**



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C.S. Lewis, Hopkins' physical appearance and manner are unmistakably masculine and characteristic. He has a small bull's physique, a muscular Celtic stockiness coupled with a nimble, powerful voice and eloquent eyes. Portraying ugly and attractive men—or a combination of both—his presence on screen may convey both intelligence and violence. While he inhabits his often unconventional yet mythic characters, Hopkins frequently lends his own classical, fatherly charm and unconventional physical personality.



Nixon (1995). Hopkins and Joan Allen.

### Embodying Power and its Perversions

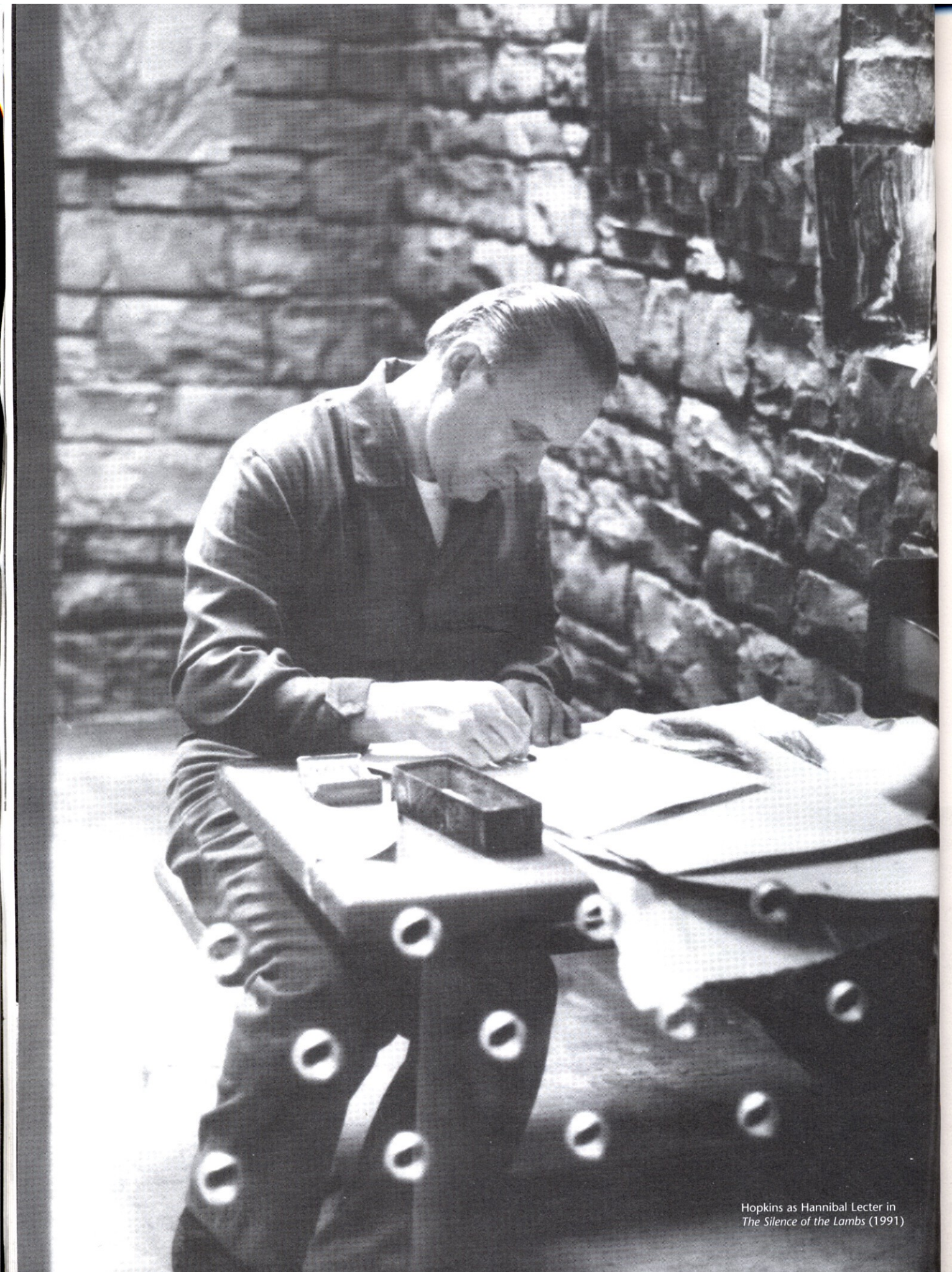
Many of Hopkins' performances are studies in power's effect on the male personality. While he has played conventional dominant and wealthy men, he has often portrayed the passions and pathologies of power. In *The Elephant Man* (David Lynch, 1980) Hopkins is the enlightened Victorian man of science while in *Howard's End* (James Ivory, 1992) he is the characteristically visionless and hypocritical Edwardian husband. In *Meet Joe Black* (Martin Brest, 1999) and in *The Edge* (Lee Tamahori, 1998), Hopkins plays successful tycoons, establishment stereotypes, while in *Legends of the Fall* (Edward Zwick, 1994), he portrays the sovereign, leonine Colonel Ludlow. However, Hopkins is particularly gifted at playing extraordinary and unusual men. He has memorably incarnated political 'freaks' such as Adolf Hitler for television (*The Bunker*, 1980) and Richard Nixon in Oliver Stone's biopic, *Nixon* (1995). His most effective and celebrated roles are characterised by compulsive and seductive violence. He has definitively played the old vengeful warrior Titus Andronicus in *Titus* (Julia Taylor, 1999) as well as, of course, the aberrant mythical cannibal, Dr Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal*. These historical and mythic characters are all marked by the extremities and pathologies of power.

In Oliver Stone's *Nixon*, Hopkins impressively impersonates the father of the nation as a fundamentally flawed man of power, psychically warped as well as physically restless and tormented. Richard Nixon of course is a modern historical figure who has become the very index of patrician deceit. He is merciless at snaring and humiliating his political rivals although he remains consumed by self-doubt. Nixon's career exhibits the natural capacity of power to alienate and corrupt its masters. It also reveals the sadomasochistic dynamic of power. This disturbing dynamic of power permeates Nixon's psyche and his relationship with America. He is haunted by the death of his two brothers and marked by the bonds of maternal love and faith. 'My mother was a saint,' he tells reporters. At the same time, he lies to his family. Violently enigmatic, Nixon is a Puritan Quaker and a foul-mouthed liar. Emotionally severed, the drunken and depressive Nixon is also

particularly plagued by self-hatred. Eternally jealous of wealthy golden boys Jack and Bobby Kennedy, Nixon is an ugly man and knows it. Nixon spurns his wife's sexual advances, reminding her 'I'm not Jack Kennedy'. He wants to be loved by the people but never will be. The young despise him. Capturing the president's essential characteristics, Hopkins gives Nixon a tarnished humanity. Incorporating Nixon's nervous and troubled gestures, Hopkins invests him with a physical awkwardness and restlessness. The actor's atypical physical personality and aggressive energy effectively match Nixon's unattractive physical presence and temperament. Equally, Hopkins' characteristic sadomasochistic vitality successfully captures Nixon's paradoxically violent self-control, vicious political pugnacity and quasi-psychotic paranoia.

While Nixon explores the sadomasochistic influence of power on the powerful, the literary adaptation *Remains of the Day* (James Ivory, 1993) examines the alienating effect of the poisonous power relationship of class on its subjects. In this Merchant/Ivory production, Hopkins plays Stevens, the perfect English butler. Stevens is psychically deformed by the sophisticated severity of England's pre-World War II class system. As he constantly denies himself, his career and life are fundamentally masochistic. Utterly desensitised, he is embarrassed by his old father's humanity and cannot admit his love for the housekeeper Miss Kenton, played by Emma Thompson. The manservant conforms to the hegemonies of class and is all too conscious of its importance. When mistaken for a gentleman, Stevens responds in kind and enjoys the role. He is enslaved by the insidious ideology of reverence and craves the honours bestowed upon Englishmen of rank. Conscious of class and immobilised by a life of denial, his inability to express romantic love particularly reflects the alienating power of class on the personality. As Stevens, Hopkins perfectly incorporates the internalised violence of class alienation, playing the manservant as psychically deformed and perversely rational. Stevens cannot recognise romantic and familial love in a house which is not his own. A life of sacrifice and ritual has transformed him into an absent, correct presence. In response





Hopkins as Hannibal Lecter in  
*The Silence of the Lambs* (1991)



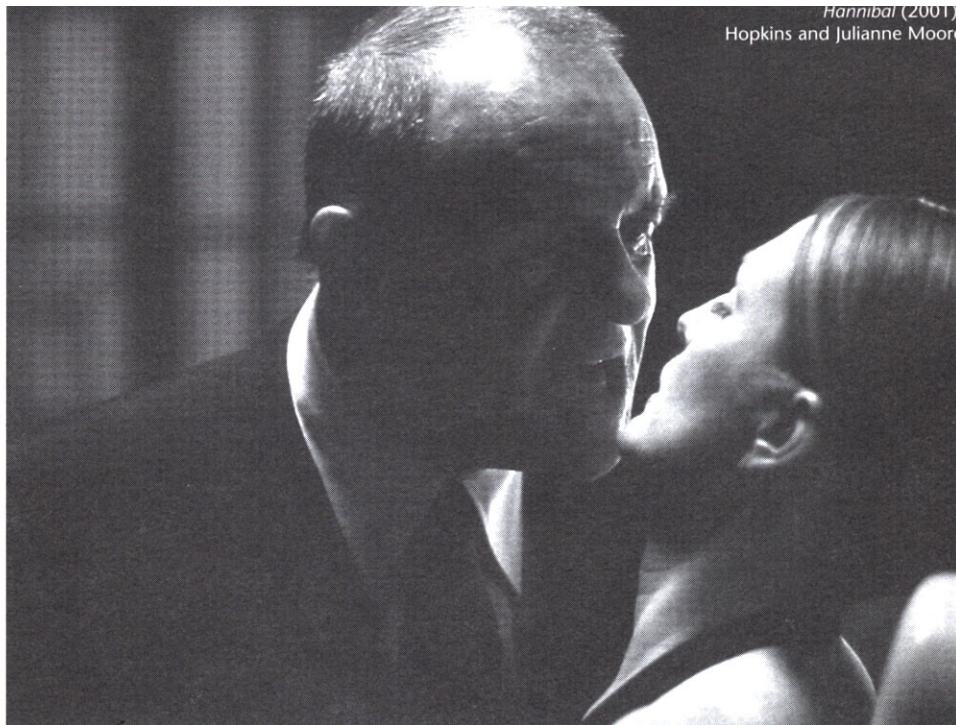
to the mockery of his superiors, he repeats that he is ignorant of world affairs: 'I'm very sorry, sir, but I am unable to be of assistance on this matter.' Hopkins gives Steven's voice a polite yet sterile and monotone quality reflecting absolute self-negation. Identifying totally with the English patrician order, Stevens has perverted his very humanity. His ultimate tragedy is that he never expresses his love for the housekeeper Miss Kenton. Although bizarrely difficult to incorporate—the character of the perfect, invisible English butler is an essentially empty man—it is one of Hopkins' finest roles.

Anthony Hopkins is an exemplary player of men of strength and violence. In Julia Taymor's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Hopkins portrays the eponymous archetypal warrior with great subtlety and power. The personification of Roman martial masculinity, Titus conforms with the rituals of war. In retribution for the death of his own son—motivated by 'a cruel, irreligious piety'—the Roman general orders the execution of the eldest son of Tamora, the captive enemy Queen of the Goths. This killing in turn unleashes an unrelenting cycle of vengeful bloody violence. Tamora's sons rape and mutilate Titus' daughter and Titus' sons are framed and executed for murder. Hopkins imparts an understated dignity and confusion as an old warrior ill at ease with the game of government. On his knees in the rain and mud, he displays a tragic desperation and rage as a father pleading for the lives of his sons. There is also something unbearably poignant about Titus' efforts to humour his mutilated, traumatised daughter and young grandson at the family dining table. Titus' response to his horrific world fuses the tragic and comic. When the old general is confronted with the decapitated heads of his sons, he laughs. Humour shields him from unbelievable horror; it is the human response. Finally, in vengeance, Titus revels in a wild, black humour as the camp chef of Tamora's rapist sons. Encompassing vanity, humanity and madness, the role of Titus has authentic range. With strength, intelligence and economy, Hopkins captures Titus' essentially violent and tragic character.

#### Playing Patriarchal Lovers and the Monstrous Father

As he often embodies extreme and tortured power, Hopkins' romantic characters are frequently tragic. Several of his screen relationships are defined by loss and characterised by physical and psychological distance. In *Shadowlands* (Richard Attenborough, 1993) Hopkins's withdrawn bachelor, the writer C.S. Lewis, opens himself up to love only to witness the death of his beloved soul-mate, the American poet Joy Gresham, played by Debra Winger. In *84 Charing Cross Road* (David Jones, 1986), the platonic-romantic relationship between Hopkins' bookstore manager, the married, gentle Londoner, Frank Doel and Helen Hanff, his vivacious New York correspondent (played by Anne Bancroft), is purely literary. Their extraordi-

nary friendship is sustained through twenty years of letter-writing. When Helen eventually reaches England, she discovers that her cherished friend has died. Hopkins precisely and exquisitely plays Frank Doel as an ordinary, sweet middle-class English husband. In one memorable scene, Hopkins' Frank Doel prepares to dine with his wife. He tastes the food and slowly digests. Finally looking at her, he pronounces, 'Very nice, very tasty'. It is a study in articulate, measured restraint. As Helen Hannf never actually meets her beloved correspondent, the perfect, self-negating butler of *The Remains of the Day* never demonstrates his love for his object of adoration, Miss Kenton. Stevens tragically denies eroticism and romance. For twenty years, she waits for him to admit his love. He never does. In a finely observed scene, a young Miss Kenton visits Stevens' rooms and finds him reading a novel. Believing it to be risqué, she coquettishly corners him. He protests, 'This is my private time, you're invading it.' As she slowly pries the book away from him, Stevens remains rigid and silent. He tries to turn away but gazes at her face and hair, a look of tenderness and controlled anxiety in his glazed eyes. Stevens' hand is held up, shielding him, but for a moment it seems as if it might caress or touch her head. Marked by a fraught serenity and secrecy, the encounter is a consummate moment of powerful though repressed eroticism. While essentially yearning for love, Stevens embodies a particularly masculine denial of romance. Hopkins gives Stevens a powerful subtlety and stillness which is unusually eloquent. In some of his best roles, the lovers he portrays are often physically and/or psychologically distant, reticent or nearly emotionally autistic. Nevertheless, Hopkins has played varied types of male sexuality. Equally, they are often extreme men. While he plays Englishmen who conventionally, excessively or pathologically personify hegemonic qualities of self-control as in *84 Charing Cross Road*, *Shadowlands* and *The Remains of the Day* respectively, he has also played the excessively virile Pablo Picasso in *Surviving Picasso* (James Ivory, 1996) and the perversely romantic cannibal Hannibal Lecter, a male human monster characterised by



Hannibal (2001), Hopkins and Julianne Moore



extreme violence and deviance. What unites many of his performances is the effect of love and power on the male psyche.

Hopkins' choice of roles are also revealing and interesting in that he often plays the powerful and gifted older man to a young woman. It is a simultaneously perverse and conventional relationship. Merchant/Ivory's *Surviving Picasso* is about the effect of the charismatic male on the hearts and minds of women. Charming and commanding, the great artist questions, cajoles and amuses his child-women. Flattering prospective lover Françoise Gilot (played by Natascha McElhone), he repeats his mythic line, 'You know I painted your face before you were born. No one stops you on the street and says you're a Picasso?' Picasso makes young women feel both unique and possessed. He also destroys many of them, Gilot being the exception. The psychologically tortured former lover Dora Maar (played by Julianne Moore) taunts Gilot: 'He'll leave you when he's ready. Even then, you won't be free of him. Without him, there is nothing. After Picasso, only God.' Abandonment drives them to madness and depression. Picasso is aware of his power. With double irony, he warns Gilot: 'You're now in the labyrinth of a minotaur. Aren't you afraid you'll never get out? You must know that the minotaur perishes if he doesn't devour at least two young maidens a day?' Loving Picasso is of course a perversion. It is the love of the monstrous father, manifesting desire for an ideal, extreme masculinity. The woman-child wants to be completely possessed and incorporated by the erotic 'monster' Picasso. He is responsible for this romantic pathology. Dora Maar cries, 'You have contaminated the whole world.' The great artist's violent magnetism, duplicity and sadism have a toxic power. A balding old man who was never handsome, he nevertheless has a remarkably potent presence. Picasso is a flamboyant teacher and entertainer. With dramatic and playful gestures, the artist incorporates and performs the roles of the extravagant patriarch. By playing Picasso, Hopkins assumes a role which signifies an archetypal masculine charisma.

Ultimately, however, Hopkins' most mythic and popular symbolic father-figure is the cannibalistic serial killer Hannibal Lecter. Perhaps particularly for female audiences, the narrative essence of *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal*, both adaptations of Thomas Harris' popular novels, is the father-daughter relationship. The strange romance between FBI agent Clarice Starling and Hannibal Lecter is a pulp Gothic version of the classical Electra myth. Although a figure of fear and repulsion, Hannibal Lecter is an ideal and seductive father.

Hannibal the Cannibal is the 'star' performance of *The Silence of the Lambs*. He is a man of a certain age with a very white face, sleeked-back hair and luminous eyes. Gifted with a phallic wit and an equally powerful physical strength, he is capable of a peculiar reptilian stillness and savage, unpremeditated violence. A psychiatrist by profession and a practising cannibal, he is at once the epitome of culture and an elegantly barbaric aberration. Simultaneously romantic and real, his charisma is violent and sorcerous. With a courtly old World manner, he exudes a charming yet perverse allure. Like Dracula and Svengali, he hypnotises. As Lecter, Hopkins incarnates his aggressive seductiveness and extreme individualism. His ironic posturing and camp role-playing mirror the fluid and self-engendering post-modern

personality. For the cannibal is a radical reader of our culture and myths. Hopkins revels in Lecter's camp Gothic humour. As Lecter, he also assumes the traditional role of the British/European actor. He plays the charismatic upper class 'European' role signified by wit, charm, an immaculate manner and extra-morality. The romanticisation of Lecter's undemocratic personality expresses a peculiarly American nostalgia for the rights of the aristocrat. His murders are absolute and autonomous expressions of his singular and feudal self. In blackly comic fashion, Lecter's escape unfairly matches singular and elite genius against bland and inarticulate 'buddy-buddy' egalitarianism. The cannibalisation and bizarre crucifixion of his police guard symbolises his unique powers of enlightenment. With his Dracula-white face tainted scarlet with blood and hand wafting to Bach's Goldberg Variations, Dr. Lecter reveals a sublime indifference and immaculate narcissism. His crimes are performances in which his own body may become a work of art. A real chameleon, Lecter escapes the forces of law, order and medicine in *Silence* by literally wearing the face of another.

However, the most compelling role of Lecter is as romantic icon, specifically as the patriarchal monster and would-be lover of young F.B.I agent Clarice Starling, played by Jodie Foster. *Silence* describes this attractive though depraved relationship between an extreme, pathological mature male and a normal, healthy young woman mythically. The deviant though diabolically masculine Lecter is drawn to the extraordinary yet conventional Clarice who personifies humanity and heroism. For Clarice, Lecter is a monstrous, almost magically inhuman man. He is a source of fear, fascination and enlightenment. *Silence* is politically and erotically interesting because it sets up these compelling tensions and does not resolve them. Although generically a psychological thriller with reference to the horror and slasher film, *Silence* is fundamentally a fairytale which comments knowingly and ironically on the genre. It is arguably a feminist fairytale in that femininity itself is ultimately linked to humanity and masculinity is consistently portrayed as ineffectual, vain and inhuman. Jodie Foster's Clarice is played with a naturalistic warmth and integrity which contrasts effectively with Hopkins' Lecter's narcissistic theatricality. As the fairytale beast, the cannibal Lecter is the source of knowledge and enlightenment. He is symbolically bound to Clarice's passage to maturity. She grows in response to Lecter's seductive imperative of story-telling which is integral to the fairytale function of the monster. The archetypal figure of the cannibal spurs on the narrative, initiating and crafting speech. Sublimely and dynamically oral, he also enjoys supernatural qualities. Although captive, Lecter can make things happen through the very power of speech. He can equally read minds and sift the truth—warning Clarice, 'Don't lie or I'll know'—and smell all that a body carries. Magnetically powerful, Lecter's mind has a real, murderous quality.

Throughout *Silence*, the relationship between Lecter and Clarice remains provocatively chaste. Lecter remains an ambiguous figure for Clarice, shrouded in an uniquely masculine and psychotic mystique. He incorporates a species of timeless and pathological power. He is simultaneously 'other' as well





*Surviving Picasso*  
(1996). Natascha  
McElhone co-stars.

as a personification of phallogentric and phallic power. He is also deviantly romantic. Cannibalism is metaphorically sexual. In classical myth, cannibalism and incest are transgressive but divine attributes of the gods. In *Silence*, a kind of incestuous, inter-generational desire and fear underlies the archetypal father-daughter relationship of Lecter and Clarice. Clarice is particularly haunted by the death of her good father, the town marshall. She idealises patriarchy as strong, fair and honour-bound and her role model, Jack Crawford, must live up to her expectations. The father is the child-woman Clarice's primary object of love and identification. Lecter's patrician gallantry is attractive yet perversely violent. He kills fellow inmate Miggs for sexually insulting Clarice—'I can smell your cunt'—and throwing semen on her face. Armed with a corrosive charm, Lecter's lucid and twisted discourse engenders a kind of love-making with Clarice. Initially mocking and toying with her, he breaks her down with incessant interrogations. He penetrates her and opens her up. Lecter's strange and sorcerous masculinity fascinates. He is the

ultimate mind-fuck. Lecter disarms Clarice. He winks at her winningly while perusing an FBI report on the serial killer Buffalo Bill. Teaching is seduction. Personalised, it is an exercise in perversion. Language is the locus of Lecter's desire and serves the unitary purpose of seduction. Lecter objectifies Clarice for his own pleasure. His strange conversations with Clarice reflect a characteristically Sadean education. In the context of Sade's fiction, Sadean heroines may be liberated sexually but their activities are inspired by and orchestrated by an omniscient man of power. The Sadean girl's sexual education is narratively based upon eroticised, classical dialogues and is inculcated through seductive play. The use of close-ups and reflection in *Silence* narcissistically bind Lecter to Clarice. Lecter also reveals his pupil to herself. He is teaching her how to think, arming her for the hunt for Buffalo Bill. Lecter instructs her to think like a stoic, like a martial emperor: 'First principles Clarice. Simplicity. Read Marcus Aurelius. Of each particular thing, ask what is it in itself? What is its nature?' Specifically, he imparts understanding of



*The Remains of the Day* (1993)  
Emma Thompson co-stars



perversion. Grasping the perverse act is a rational exercise, demanding concentration and precision. Buffalo Bill kills what he 'covets'. As Lecter tells her, 'We begin to covet what we see everyday.' The psychopathic monster also cares for Clarice. Contemplating her from the darkness of his cell, he demonstrates a characteristically paternal concern for the *femme-enfant*, cold, cut and wet from her dangerous and solitary quest. At what will be their final encounter in *Silence*, his forefinger caresses hers. Lecter has begun to draw Clarice with his charcoal. He has chosen her as his beloved from the mass of mediocrity and corruption surrounding them. Although Lecter is a bewitching father-figure who threatens the subjectivity and integrity of the woman-child Clarice, her moral centre is not eroded by Lecter. Lecter's controlling personality and Hopkins' charismatic performance both problematise *Silence's* feminist polemics and enrich its perverse romance. In *The Silence of the Lambs*, the monstrous Lecter remains a strange and dangerous figure of female identification and fascination.

Ridley Scott's *Hannibal* is the sequel to *The Silence of the Lambs* and takes place ten years after Clarice (now played by Julianne Moore) and Lecter first meet. *Hannibal's* evident popularity reveals the cult power of Lecter as a cinematic monster. Charismatically identified with Hopkins, Lecter has become a cultural fact. In *Hannibal*, we find a liberated Lecter appropriately ensconced in Florence, a city with an extraordinary history of crime and creativity. The good doctor is a stylish mythic monster at home in such an environment. He is a man of taste and violence coveting the role of museum curator. In *Hannibal*, Hopkins plays Lecter as a stylised Renaissance man, gracing him with a swaggering walk and a dandy-esque sensibility. *Hannibal* displays a colourful and visceral Grand Guignol style and Ridley Scott effectively gives Lecter's Florentine murders an outlandish, mock-operative treatment. Hopkins correctly portrays Lecter as manifestly and monstrously camp, as the ultimate bogeyman of pulp fiction. As the minotaur and the bewitching patriarch, Lecter is also, as evidenced in *Silence of The Lambs*, a classical archetype. *Hannibal's* mass appeal is also due to our timeless hunger for myth. *Hannibal* sustains the singular romance of *Silence*, this unrealised love affair marked by symbolic incest and bestial desire. In *Hannibal*, Julianne Moore fittingly gives Clarice a classical sombre mask. Like the mythic Electra of Sophocles' antique play, Clarice is defined by love and mourning. As Electra is emotionally devoted to a father who fulfils an ideal, honourable masculinity, Clarice remains haunted by the memory of her good father, the ideal law-maker. Like Electra, Clarice has forsaken marriage and children to preserve the memory of her beloved father and become the model, successful daughter. As Electra rages against her stepfather, the 'milksoy, abomination of a father', Clarice is alienated and repelled by her lecherous and duplicitous FBI colleague, Paul Krendler. Like her classical archetype, Clarice is powerfully moral and completely isolated. After killing an African-American drug-dealer and mother in the line of duty, the traumatised Clarice becomes an outcast of the FBI boy's club. Lecter is her only champion and finally assumes the role of avenging warrior for her. His vengeance on Krendler is violent, spectacular and blackly comic. Although he is fundamentally deranged, Lecter is a supernaturally powerful

and perversely moral symbolic father. He is also a perfectly romantic would-be lover. Preferring to kill largely 'free-range rude', Lecter has the unique and bizarre morality of a psychopath. He also loves Clarice with a psychopath's love. Lecter particularly adores Clarice for her integrity for he too never compromises. Clarice remains both fearful of and attracted to this strangely moral psychopath. She is obsessed with tracking Lecter and bringing him to justice, now her sole professional purpose. Uncovering the pedophilic Mason Verger's bizarre plot to torture and kill Lecter with man-eating pigs in vengeance for the doctor's disfigurement of his face, Clarice sets out to save Lecter. She is ultimately saved by him as Mason's plot fails dramatically. Carrying Clarice off to safety, *Hannibal's* Lecter is given a more distinct but aberrantly heroic romantic image. The perverse romance between Lecter and Clarice is sustained in *Hannibal* through eroticised paternal stroking. An unseen Lecter caresses Clarice's red hair from a carousel, and when she is sleeping. It is only at the end of the film that they properly meet. The climax of *Hannibal* is aptly a dinner-party between Krendler, Clarice and the master-chef, Lecter. It is an at once violent, amusing and affecting scene. A distinct melancholy now permeates *Hannibal* and Clarice's romance. It can never be consummated. The good Clarice must always attempt to capture the psychopathic Lecter and he will of course never submit. As she is forced to release Lecter, as he kisses her goodbye, Clarice sheds a tear for she also loves her monstrous father. Anomalously pure and seductive, Lecter remains an unattainable ideal.

In popular cinema and classical literature, the female spectator identifies with the intriguing marriage between the ogre-like inhuman man and the beautiful, human heroine. From the Gothic novel to Hollywood schlock horror, women have always dreamt of monsters. While providing a subterfuge for the unspoken love and hate of the controlling and dominant father, women simultaneously recognise the boundless desires of the monster and desire its freakish yet essential masculinity. As an at once mythic and camp example of charming and psychopathic patriarchy, *Hannibal* is understandably Hopkins' most popular and iconic screen role. *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal* equally frame a hectic ten years for Hopkins in which he has played a variety of real and symbolic as well as historical and mythic fathers and 'monsters'. Hopkins' classical identity fits well with historical or literary dramas and mainstream Hollywood. It is a persona which moves seamlessly from the horror genre to prestige heritage films. Whether his roles are played with subtlety or exaggeration, they invariably portray images of difficult or inaccessible extreme masculinity. Particularly, Hopkins' archetypal performances project a masculinity which feeds on our loss and desire for our ideal yet transgressive father.

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# HIGH CLASS WHORE

## HEDY LAMARR'S STAR IMAGE IN HOLLYWOOD

by Jan Christopher Horak

Although I have spent over twenty years writing about German-speaking film émigrés who went to Hollywood after 1933, due to the anti-Semitic campaigns of the Nazis, Hedy Lamarr was for me not much more than another pretty face, this despite the fact that she was certainly one of the most successful in that group. It was only after Filmarchiv Austria in Vienna asked me to contribute to a monograph on the making of *Ecstasy* (1933) that I began to reevaluate her American career. The more films I watched, the more I read about Hedy Lamarr, the clearer it became to me that there was a discrepancy between the publicity (and historiography) surrounding Lamarr and what I was seeing on the screen. In trying to account for that discrepancy and her immense popularity in the 1940s, I realized that the producers had been caught in an ideological bind: how to take advantage of the public scandal surrounding her debut, yet still abide by Hollywood's conservative moralistic codes. Lamarr, on the other hand, was no mere pliant starlet, but an independent woman with her own agenda, which ultimately led to her downfall.

### 1. The scene of the crime

Her first nude scene pretty much sealed her fate as an actress. Indeed, it was only a matter of time before the industry realized that her market value had evaporated. In the land of *I Puritani*, they had her number. Hedy Lamarr, née Kiesler, described in her so-called memoirs Louis B. Mayer's indignant and moralizing tone as he lectured her in a London hotel:

"I saw *Ecstasy*," Mayer opened. "Never get away with that stuff in Hollywood. Never. A woman's ass is for her husband, not theatergoers. You're lovely, but I have



Publicity portrait, 1947.



the family point of view. I don't like what people would think about a girl who flits bare-assed around the screen."<sup>1</sup>

Even if the exact quote is probably fictitious, the point of view expressed matches other descriptions of the mogul of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer: Convinced of his own overwhelming importance, Mayer saw himself as a father figure to his M-G-M family and the guardian of American morality. In his mind's eye, the supposedly sixteen-year-old actress from *Ecstasy* would always be a whore, because in his patriarchal book of knowledge women could only be saints or sinners. Neither a name change, nor the attempt on the part of M-G-M to turn her image into that of a sophisticated lady would ever counteract that first impression.

That the Austrian refugee was able to stay on the A-list of Hollywood stars for at least ten years after her arrival in the United States in 1937 was due to her physical attractiveness and her intelligence, but also a function of *Zeitgeist*. Hedy Lamarr fought for her career, never allowed herself to be taken in by the money-and-sex-machine Hollywood, hired lawyers and went to court when necessary, was considered "difficult." They sold her as "the most beautiful woman in the world," the woman men dream of, an inflation of adjectives elegant and sophisticated modifying her. Yet, in contrast to other starlets of her ilk, Lamarr consistently played strong, independent women who knew what their value was in the marketplace of erotic exchange, and were not afraid to bargain. Seldom did she go down on her knees before a man without already having an eye on the prize, rarely did she put her own desire behind that of a male partner. Lamarr broke taboos (on the screen and in the gossip columns) and many women in the audience had their secret pleasure watching her, while the boys gawked. If the 1940s brought with them a degree of emancipation for women, due to the social upheavals of World War II, the post-war social order demanded that women return to the kitchen (both on cinema screens and in Ohio). The capitalist economy needed to adjust itself, by propagating an image of virginal, dependent women, happily found in the home with their children. Hedy Lamarr's star persona was no longer in demand, a world-class star reduced to fodder for gossip columnists.

For better or worse, *Ecstasy* stuck to Lamarr from the dizzy heights of her entrée into Hollywood to the long good-bye of her "has been" film career. The first announcement of her arrival in New York, a glowing review of *Algiers*, her many obituaries, all mentioned *Ecstasy* in the first paragraph. Of all German-speaking actors exiled by Adolf Hitler, Lamarr had by far the most successful career, surpassed only by Marlene Dietrich. Marlene, in contrast to Hedy, was able to translate her star image/power into an even longer Hollywood presence, possibly because her persona was defined by roles in *The Blue Angel* and *Morocco*, while Lamarr's star image was function of a non-filmic discourse centered on her behavior as an actress. In short, she had taken off her clothes at a time when no self-respecting actress did that.

Of course, Lamarr contributed to the moralistic discourse surrounding her reception as a star by claiming to have been an innocent victim of unscrupulous film producers. A queen of

Hollywood gossip, Hedda Hopper, reported early in Hedy's career:

Hedy's eyes filled with tears when she mentioned *Ecstasy*... The last scenes were taken first in the studio. Then she was taken on location and it was there she was told what she had to do. She fought against it hard and long. This so enraged the studio officials they threatened to make her pay the whole cost of the picture and declared that they would see to it she never got another. What could she do? What would you have done? Just what she did. What weapon has a 16-year-old girl to fight with against such odds? With a feeling of shame and disgrace she went home and said nothing about it.<sup>2</sup>

Hedy regurgitates this little melodrama in most subsequent published interviews, e.g. in 1949 when she wrongly names fellow Austrian refugee William Szekely as the blackmailing producer. In her memoirs she accuses director Gustav Machaty of threatening to make her pay for the lost production costs. Not until the late 1970s does she admit that her driving ambition caused her to accept the role in *Ecstasy*, even though she would have to undress for the part. Cameraman Jan Stallich substantiates her eagerness to please: "As the star of the picture, she knew she would have to appear naked in some scenes. She never made any fuss about it during the production."<sup>3</sup>

Ironically, while *Ecstasy's* contemporary reception produced a scandal narrative of a sexually aggressive woman, a modern feminist view perceives the cinematic image of an innocent woman (and mother) in search of love, and disappointed; Eva, an apparition of nature, a biblical woman *an sich*, in most significant ways Louis B. Mayer's ideal image. Simultaneously, many character traits unite Lamarr's role in *Ecstasy* with her later Hollywood star image. Even though she appears as inexperienced and innocent, *Ecstasy* visualizes the process of her emancipation, her declaration of independence from her father and her impotent and pedantic husband. Since he cannot respond to her unconscious desires as a woman, she learns to define and acknowledge them. When she leaves her true lover, it is an act of freedom and maturity, reflecting her choice to take responsibility for her husband's suicide. Within the logic of *Ecstasy's* narrative such independence is evaluated in a positive light, but a similar independence is coded pejoratively in Hollywood's moralistic *lex Americana*.

In her memoirs, Hedy Lamarr states that she was typecast as the "cold marble type," at least until she took her career in hand by producing her own films. Studio publicity machines

1. Hedy Lamarr, *Ecstasy and Me. My Life as a Woman*, Greenwich, CN: Fawcett Publishers, 1967, p. 30. It wasn't the first time Kiesler and Mayer met. Both had been guests of Max Reinhardt in his castle Leopoldskron near Salzburg. At that dinner party Mayer had shown his bad manners by characterizing *Ecstasy* as a "dirty" picture. See Christopher Young, *The Films of Hedy Lamarr*, Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1978, p. 19. This is a revised version of a piece first published in German in: Armin Loacker, *Extase* (Vienna: Filmarchiv Austria, 2001).

2. Hedda Hopper, "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood", *Chicago Daily News* v. 23.7.1938, S. 16f (AMPAS).

3. [\*\*To vse ovsem holy vymysl, protoze citovane sceny byly natceny v Jevanech a kamera zabirala Heldu, ktera se prodira houstinami a skoci do jezera], quoted in Jaroslav Broz and Myrtil Frida, "Gustav Machaty, Legenda a skutecnost/2, p. 264.





*Ecstasy* (1933)



subscribed to the image of the untouchable, incredibly beautiful glamour girl, a viewed reproduced in most subsequent film historical literature. Superficially, the stereotype seems plausible and its circulation accounts for some of her popularity. But it doesn't explain her fall from audience grace. Wasn't Grace Kelly equally aloof in the 1950s? In point of fact, Lamarr was surprisingly often cast in narratives of independent, sexually aggressive women of questionable morality. Her temporary market value may have been based on the apparent contradiction in embodying vamp and European princess at one and the same time. But the new ideology of the post-war era ended the demand for high class whores à la Kiesler. Her career's downward spiral careened into the gossip columns, the narrative of a fallen film star's troubles supplying a moral Hollywood ending (featuring heavenly justice) to the story of the girl who dared.

In contrast to today's mainstream, TV-formed journalistic practice, which measure a one-night stand with a celebrity in the currency of a million dollar book contract, publishers in Lamarr's day demanded private lives at little or no cost. She failed to make a substantial amount of money by selling her story. Not that she didn't try. Her memoirs netted her as much as \$80,000, but also the public contempt of a judge who called the book pornographic.<sup>4</sup> Had Lamarr's autobiography been published with a steady editorial hand a few years later, she might have been celebrated as a pioneer of women's liberation, a reception accorded Louise Brook's equally frank *Lulu in Hollywood*.

The last half of her life was a vicious circle of bad husbands and daytime television courtroom scenes, in which she appeared as either accuser or defendant. She wasn't rehabilitated in the press until the late 1990s when news of honorary prizes suddenly appeared. It became known that the "brainy beauty" had with the composer George Antheil patented a frequency hoping system (Spread Spectrum) in 1941, which could be used for remote control of torpedoes, but has now become the technological basis for all wireless communications. Since the patent expired before the government utilized it, the actress/inventor never earned a *sou* on an invention that is today worth billions. It was a bitter end for a woman who was filled with contradictions, neither Mary nor Magdalena, rather a multi-faceted, intelligent, and not uncomplicated, modern woman. A woman ahead of her time.

## 2. On the road to Culver City

Hedwig Kiesler was born in Vienna on 9 November 1914. Her father, Emil Kiesler, was born in Lemberg (at the back-end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), but like many Jews in the *stetl* moved to the capital to become director of a bank, the Vienna Banking Association. Her Budapest-born mother, Gertrud Lichtwitz, came from the Jewish *haute bourgeoisie*, allowing Hedy to grow up in Vienna's fashionable 19<sup>th</sup> district in a privileged and cultured environment. It remains a mystery why Lamarr never breathed a word of her Jewish heritage once she got to Hollywood, but one can speculate that she was merely following L.B. Mayer's dictum that a Jewish background was to be denied in public at all costs. After attending a public high school in Vienna and a private finishing school in Switzerland,

Kiesler experienced her film debut in the Austrian film, *Money on the Street* (1930), following it up with *Storm in a Waterglass* (1930).

She took acting classes with Prof. Arndt in Vienna and Max Reinhardt in Berlin, where a contract from Russian emigré Alexander Granowsky led her. In *The Trunks of Mr. O.F.* (1931) and *His Majesty King Ballyhoo* (1931), she played supporting roles, but failed to attract the attention of European reviewers. However, when the latter film was screened in German in several New York City cinemas, Kiesler garnered favorable mention in the press. She is "the girl, who neatly demonstrates that German and Austrian movie actresses need not necessarily all be Marlene Dietrichs."<sup>5</sup> Whether the reviews actually produced an offer to go to Hollywood seems unlikely, but during the production of *Ecstasy*, Lamarr was quoted: "I refused an offer to Hollywood. I don't want to become the slave of film, but rather want to make films or take breaks when I feel like it."<sup>6</sup> Apparently, even at a tender age she was quite sure of herself.

However, *Ecstasy*, which she shot with Gustav Machaty in the summer of 1932, catapulted her to fame. While the film immediately encountered the rage of the censors, the ensuing scandal initially did her little harm. She was engaged by the Viennese *Theater in der Josefstadt* to play the title role in "Elisabeth of Austria," but then Fritz Mandl appeared on the horizon. On 10 December 1933, she married Friedrich Alexander Maria Mandl and retired. Mandl was a Viennese arms dealer and a friend of the German National-Socialists, at least until 1938 when the Nazis forced him to exile in Argentina. An often-repeated false rumor has it that Mandl tried to buy and destroy all existing copies of *Ecstasy*. For three years Lamarr lived in a golden cage, only to flee to Paris and then London in the summer of 1937. Aboard the "S.S. Normandie" to New York in September 1937, L.B. Mayer broke down and gave her a contract, after she had rejected his first offer in a London hotel.

Eight months later she was still waiting for a film release on the Culver City lot—at least one project with Gustav Machaty assigned as a director apparently fell through—when Mayer loaned Lamarr out to Walter Wanger who was preparing *Algiers* for United Artists. In point of fact, filming had already begun in North Africa without an actress having been cast in the role of Gaby. It was a lucky break for Lamarr, who suddenly found herself cast in a leading role next to Charles Boyer and Sigrd Gurie. The novice was working with some of the best technicians in the industry, including John Cromwell (director), John Howard Lawson and James M. Cain (script), James Wong Howe (camera). The film and especially Hedy Lamarr were a sensation. Mayer earned \$12,000 on her three-week gig, receiving as an added bonus a new star with a much higher market value, without having to invest money in a costly star buildup. Sales of artificial pearls and turbans, popularized by Lamarr in the film, shot through the roof. A survey of Columbia students ascertaining their fantasy partner on a desert island revealed Hedy to be the flavor *du jour*.

Lamarr plays a young Parisian woman who visits the infamous Casbah in Tunis as a tourist with her rich friends and there meets the thief, Pepe le Moko. Taking Pepe's subjective



view, the camera caresses her jewels, pearls, and fur-lined jacket, but stops on her swollen, erotic lips. The first impression is erroneous. She is not a lady of the world, but rather a beautiful little shop girl who is going to marry a very much older and unattractive man for his money. Pepe and Gaby fall in love and learn that they grew up in the same Parisian quarter. He says: "What did you do before the jewels?" She replies: "I wanted them". Can desire be expressed any more tersely? When her aging fiancé confronts her with the affair, she responds pointedly that her love is not a part of the bargain and his rights are validated through marriage. The exchange is clear; she gives her love to a man of her own choosing.

James Wong Howe's camera loves Lamarr's face. Light and shadow sculpt an image of a woman endowed with all the riches of class and pedigree, her eyes, lips and hair brazenly eroticized. White is the actress's color of choice, the color of luxury, the color that best sets off her jet-black hair. It is not known whether Howe saw *Ecstasy*, but like Jan Stallich, he understands the photogenic intensity of Lamarr's physiognomy. She looks into the camera, virtually certain of her effect. Mayer defined Lamarr as the "most beautiful woman in the world," but the woman on screen was always also available to the highest bidder. Gaby's jewels are photographically reproduced with the same love as her lips, both signifying market value in terms that Gaby understands. Her beauty allows her to remain master of her own fate.

### 3. The lady in white

In 1939 Hedy Lamarr is ubiquitous in America's public consciousness. No less than nine fan magazines place her on their covers. L.B. Mayer, however, is unable to translate the intense publicity into immediate box office gold. The production of her first M-G-M film, *I Take This Woman* (1940) stretches over eighteen months, her second film, *Lady of the Tropics* (1939), is released first. Both films are box office failures and the end of Lamarr's career is again in sight. Fortunately, she wins back L.B.'s mercurial heart with *Boom Town* (1940), having fought for fourth billing behind Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy, and Claudette Colbert, and convincing Mayer that she and not another actress should get the part.

Lamarr plays Karen Vanmeer, the beautiful and intelligent consultant of John McMasters (Gable) with ambitions to become his next wife. In her first scene, Hedy wears a white, silk top with flowing, wide cut black slacks, her red lips shine in a close-up as she takes in the view of McMasters. She works for (and possibly sleeps with) his aging competitor, but she is ready to switch horses. Left alone, they talk of mares and horse racing, but on the screen we see her strutting in the stables. The end of the scene makes evident that she is hardly his infe-



*Algiers* (1933). Hedy Lamarr's first Hollywood movie.

rior in verbal combat. Just as she has left her first husband to join the oil king, she will leave him to become McMaster's partner, while he increasingly neglects his own wife. Karen's under-cooled erotic energy is however purely utilitarian in scope, since she is interested only in money and power. From the point of view of the audience, though, she is morally suspect, because she is willing to break up a marriage to achieve her goals, even if she finally withdraws of her own accord.

The same year, Hedy stars in *Comrade X* (1940), which is likewise a financial success. Some sources characterize the film as a poor imitation of *Ninotchka* (1939), just as some critics have described Lamarr as a bargain basement Garbo. Yet, the story of a Soviet streetcar driver and her aging father (Felix

4. Two ghostwriters, Leo Guild and Cy Rice, wrote the book and sold it to a publisher for \$200,000. Initially, Lamarr was paid \$30,000, and one can assume she sued the publisher, McFadden-Bartell, in order to procure more money, although she disclaimed any authorship in court. In fact, she had taped 50 hours with Rice and also proofed the written manuscript, so that the book cannot be considered a pure work of fiction. See *Los Angeles Times*, 27 September 1966 (AMPAS).

5. See "Man Braucht Kein Geld", *New York Post*, quoted in Young, p. 86. Compare *New York Times*, 16 November 1932, p. 15, which calls her a "charming Austrian girl."

6. See *Mein Film*, No. 356, 1932, p. 10. Thanks to Armin Loacker. Lamarr uses almost the same words years later when she asks Mayer to release her from her M-G-M contract: "I don't want to work as hard as I have. If I were out of my MGM contract I would only work when I wanted to, and at what I wanted to." Lamarr 1967, p. 110.





*Ziegfeld Girl* (1941). Lamarr, Edward Everett Horton, Tony Martin.


Bressart) is a much more openly anti-Communist propaganda tract than Lubitsch's film, utilizing the symbols and signs of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi film. Not only are German Nazism and Soviet Communism visualized as equally vicious totalitarian systems, especially through the character of Emil von Hofer (Sig Ruman), the story could have played equally well in a Third Reich setting, with Hitler taking Stalin's place on the wall, the Gestapo subbing for the GPU. Since both the producer, Gottfried Reinhardt, and the writer, Walter Reisch, were exiled Austrians, it is likely that they hoped to also communicate an anti-Fascist message.

More interesting in the context of this essay is the fact that a strong, independent woman is marked here not as a prostitute, but rather equally pejoratively as an uncompromising Communist ideologue. Not only does she carry a masculine name, Theodore (because the law requires all trolley drivers to be male), but she also demonstrates a very male drive. When the American journalist McKinley Thompson searches her out on a tram, she is wearing a man's uniform and belligerently bumping into a truck that is driving too slow for her taste. She is the one who actively takes his arm and leads him on a march through the city, all the while lecturing intelligently on the value of Marxist-Leninism. Furthermore, it is she who initiates the first erotic contact by kissing him, while he pretends to be

disgusted with American women who want to be treated as sexual objects. She replies: "You are the first American man with a soul; it has a strange effect on me." While the sexually aggressive women in other films get rid of their husbands/johs out of avarice, Theodore has sent two husbands to a gulag, because of their political unreliability. Of course, Theodore is turned around by the end of the film, but only because her leader has betrayed her and the movement, and the main ideological thrust of the film is aimed at sexual politics: women who display male behavior are unnatural, whether in a Communist or capitalist system.

In her next comedy, Lamarr was allowed to play not only a "decent" girl, at least according to the script, but also a Viennese refugee. In *Come Live With Me* (1941), Johnny Jones must marry an American or be deported by U.S. Immigration. She finds a penniless writer (James Stewart) and pays him a weekly salary, if he marries her legally. A Hollywood love story. However, the film introduces her as the mistress of a wealthy, married publisher, and it is evident that he is the one paying for her luxury apartment, maid, and fashionable clothing, since as a refugee without visible means of support, she would hardly have had the financial wherewithal (even if the script mentions a father who has been murdered by the Nazis and left a small inheritance). Not until the last minute does she





decide to stay with her legal husband, so that the happy ending is over-determined. Furthermore, Johnny cannot completely eliminate the scent about her of the adulteress and kept woman, causing her character to be perceived by the audience with no small degree of ambivalence. The film was a flop.

According to her own statements, Lamarr had to beg L.B. Mayer to give her a supporting role in *Ziegfeld Girl* (1941), because he was angry with the actress for having forced him to take her to court, in order to stop her from appearing in a Broadway show.<sup>7</sup> The leads were played by James Stewart, Judy Garland, and Lana Turner, although Lamarr received billing above Turner. Hedy plays Sandra Kolter, a refugee married to an exiled musician (Philip Dorn). When by chance she gets a job in Ziegfeld's show—an assistant comments "She looks better under wraps than all the others unwrapped," the husband forces her to choose between him and the money. She leaves and starts an affair with the male star of the show. In her first show number she is again dressed in white with stars afloat above her black hair, the camera cleverly highlighting her beauty while camouflaging her lack of dancing talent. While the Garland character becomes a star of the Ziegfeld stage (remaining asexual), Turner's character chooses the path into the abyss by becoming a kept woman for a wealthy patron of the theatre. Sandra takes a path between the two: She returns to her husband after he becomes a successful musician and gives up the stage. But the happy end again cannot cover up the fact that she has probably committed adultery and that she uses men as a means to an end: "Men are easy to handle, if you are not in love with them." Once again Lamarr's character exudes strength and expresses woman's need to fulfill her own desire, while appearing morally ambiguous in American middle class eyes, because the exchange sex and money is ever present.

Desire expressed in its most radical form best describes Lamarr's character in *White Cargo* (1943), in which she plays Tondalayo, the jungle girl in the Congo. She drives every white man on an African rubber plantation in 1910 crazy, until the foreman, played by Walter Pidgeon, kills her with her own poison. She is the local prostitute, servicing every European man in the region, just as long as she receives trinkets and pretty clothing in return. As a creature of nature and a "mulatto," Tondalayo is unencumbered by the social mores binding her European clients, her relationships to all men defined a simple equation of sex for money, so that she is incapable of understanding her marriage to the Englishman, Langford, in anything but such terms: "You give me many things. Tondalayo stay a long time." As in *Lady of the Tropics*, Lamarr again plays an exotic woman of mixed race, but the Hays Office demanded that all references to her ethnicity be excised, since miscegenation was still a taboo in Hollywood, even if it was those origins which account for her behavior in the narrative.

As a foreign exotic, Lamarr played against her type as sophisticated lady. With the help of masses of cocoa butter to darken her white skin, a tiny bra and the flimsiest of silk veils covering her lower body, Lamarr embodies a most primitive eroticism, which is further accentuated through high key light and shadows. On the other hand, her image of a woman for

sale is consistent with previous films, insinuations of sado-masochism are apparent. For example, Tondalayo asks her husband why he doesn't beat her ("Don't you love Tondalayo anymore?") or later she plays with a bull whip, it dawning on her that her marriage is keeping her from getting any more "Manipalava" (sex and money). American males were impressed, streaming to the cinemas in droves. Her first line, "I am Tondalayo" became a household quotation. The role also bore a delayed fruit when Cecil B. DeMille screened the film years later and decided to cast Lamarr in the leading role in *Samson and Delilah*.<sup>8</sup>

Lamarr supposedly turned down the leads in both *Casablanca* (1943) and *Gaslight* (1944), both roles going to her some time competitor, Ingrid Bergman. In point of fact, it seems that L.B. Mayer refused to lend Hedy to Warners, at least in the case of the former film. Instead she played a short time later in Warner Brothers' *The Conspirators* (1944) and *Experiment Perilous* (1944), the latter a loan-out to RKO which she called her favorite film role. Similar to Ingrid Bergman in *Gaslight*, Lamarr portrays a Victorian wife, Alida, who is psychologically terrorized by her husband, because of his fear of the female sex. Alida loses control over her life the way no other Lamarr character ever does, and must rely on another man to rescue her. Hedy noted: "It is a theme that fascinated me, with reverse English. I was often the victim of a husband, but it was my own strength that broke the bonds". Under the direction of Jacques Tourneur, one of the few first class directors to work with Lamarr, her character remains a tragic figure, bathed in the light and shadow of *film noir*, until the final moments of the film catapult it to a happy end. Black, not white is her color in this film. However, the construction of the matrimonial couple, older man and innocent young woman, harks back to *Ecstasy*, especially the fact that Alida is also marked as a child of nature. The opening sequence in particular, in which Alida as a young girl runs through the fields of Vermont, could have come straight from *Ecstasy*.

A very similar scene introduces Lamarr's title character in *The Strange Woman* (1946), directed by Edgar G. Ulmer. Following a double exposure in which young Jenny, reflected in a pool of water, is transformed from a girl to a young woman, the camera follows her running through the fields to the town, where she gets tips from Lena, the local prostitute, on how to find a john among the sailors in port. Just as the film begins in nature and ends literally in front of a cat house, so too can the film never quite decide whether Jenny as a woman is a force of nature or a street walker. Without a doubt, though, she is a strong-willed woman who guides her own fate from the beginning to the end. First she seduces a wealthy old businessman (Gene Lockhardt) to marry her, even though she has previously had an affair with the man's son. Then she tries to talk the son into murdering his father. After the husband actually dies in a boating accident, she convinces the son that he was at fault, driving him to suicide. Next she seduces the

7. Young, p. 143. Lamarr, p. 89, fails to mention these difficulties, stating instead that Mayer immediately called Pandro Berman, asking to give her "solid cameo" in the film.

8. *Newsweek*, 28 November 1949, p. 72.



husband's bailiff, John Evered (George Sanders) even though he is engaged to her friend. The studio's publicity pushed the evil woman angles, quoting a fire and brimstone preacher: "The lips of a Strange Woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than silk. But her fate is bitter as wormwood...sharp as a two-edged sword."

She therefore seems to fit the known stereotype of the self-serving *femme fatale*, but demonstrates thoroughly positive characteristics against the grain, representing repeatedly the interests of the town's poor, giving freely of her money and time. When Evered, her second husband, wants to kick the aging prostitute, Lena, out of their home, Jenny screams: "In what way is she different from us? More honest. You good, righteous man, you hypocrite. Telling others what to do, while you live in this house with me." Here, then, the film equates illegal with marital prostitution, even if only in a secondary clause. The quote could have been from Lamarr herself. In her memoirs she writes: "A star can have anything; if there is something she can't buy, there's always a man to give it to her. (Does this shock you? Well, I have no use for hypocrisy.)"<sup>9</sup>

The story has to lead to a just conclusion with god-sent punishment. Not only is Jenny infertile and unable to present her beloved husband with a son, she dies in an accident that she herself caused. Interestingly, Lamarr had bought the story herself and produced the film independently. *The Strange Woman* supposedly made a bit of money, although its critical reception was divided.

#### 4. The Long Good-Bye

With the end of World War II and the return of American servicemen, women were evicted from the workplace to make room for their future husbands. Simultaneously, Lamarr's star begins to fall. In the same year, 1945, as she does not renew her contract with M-G-M (she had in fact made only one film for them since 1943), she begins producing her own films, albeit with B-Film independent producers: Hunt Stromberg, Jack Chertok, Eugene Frenke. After the merely modest at best success of *The Strange Woman*, she tries to bring her image to line with the times' more passive type, however with little success. *Dishonored Lady* is a paradigmatic film for the peace, visualizing as it does the transformation of a sex-and-career obsessed woman into a well-behaved *hausfrau*.

In the film's first scene, in which Madeleine Damien suffers a car accident, it is made clear to the audience that she is close to a nervous breakdown, because—contrary to her nature as a woman—she is manically running the advertising department of a high-powered New York fashion magazine and nymphomatically switching her male partners in bed (especially if it is professionally advantageous). Men admire her beauty, fear her for her intelligence, and because "she thinks like a man." "I pay my own way, and make my own rules", she says, but the line is hardly meant to be understood positively. On the contrary, the psychiatrist who finds her after the accident and treats her, diagnoses her malaise as having repressed her true nature as a woman, which will only reappear after she has given up her job and previous life. After a quick one night stand with a wealthy client, she moves to Brooklyn, takes a new name and

becomes a painter. She meets a doctor and promptly falls in love, but before a happy end is in sight, her "dark" past is exposed in a murder trial, in which she is the accused. The pejorative connection established between unbridled sexuality and professional success is addressed specifically to a female audience, while promulgating monogamy with a husband (who will care for her) and children. It was an obvious invitation to American women. *Dishonored Lady* flopped, possibly because the central character was drawn too negatively over large stretches of the film.

In her next film, the comedy *Let's Live A Little*, Lamarr tries a little harder to reinvent her star image more towards the passively "feminine." Even though she is a psychiatrist, she allows a male patient to make sexual advances to her without protest, and then falls in love with him. Dr. O.J. Loring is subsequently willing to give up all her other patients and concentrate on her man, while he must decide between her and his (professionally active) fiancée. The happy end has been pre-programmed, the narrative just another parable of evolving post-war gender relations.

Hedy Lamarr celebrated her last major success in *Samson and Delilah* (1949). The film marries an Old Testament style, evangelical Christian moralism with the theatrical exploitation of unadulterated sex. Even before the film opened in the cinemas, DeMille worked overtime promoting the only barely clothed Lamarr as Delilah, with about as much style as a hawk in a circus side-show. The actress appeared on the cover of *Newsweek*, which proclaimed her to be a "sex symbol unequalled for pure muzzle velocity in the Western World," and placed her in the vamp tradition of Theda Bara and Jean Harlow.<sup>10</sup> Despite the Biblical setting, lewdness was the order of the day.

Once again Lamarr portrays the sexually aggressive woman who stubbornly follows her own desires. In her first scene she sits on a wall and throws figs at Samson (Victor Mature), but he only has eyes for the blonde, passively un-erotic and too well-behaved sister, Semadar (Angela Lansbury). That the dark-haired Samson prefers the blond *Shickse* to Delilah's Jewish beauty may speak volumes about the ethnic component of the gender discourse in Hollywood cinema. As Samson and Delilah race through the desert in his chariot, she grabs his strong pectorals and seems close to orgasm; later she tells a competitor (Samson's childhood sweetheart who in her deep religiosity should be the role model for all the female characters) that she loves Samson as "man of flesh and blood." However, she cannot get his attention, even though she is willing to use any means at her disposal. She becomes the richest courtesan in Gaza. The tragedy is inevitable, especially in the moment when Samson reveals to her the secret of his strength. As in the Old Testament story, she symbolically castrates him by cutting his hair, his phallic power dissipates, and the spider woman triumphs. But what a fall. Delilah is more fascinating, intelligent, and sexually alluring than every other female in the story, a fact that even Samson grasps and so eventually succumbs to her charms. Thus, while DeMille's primary narrative can do nothing but function in dualistic categories of Madonna and whore, Hedy Lamarr's Delilah transcends those parameters.



Inscribed in the primary text is an ancient (and new) patriarchal spirit, defining any independent and consciously erotic woman as the devil's tool, while subservient women are supposedly the ideal. But the fact remains that Paramount's biggest moneymaker of all time (up to that point) only achieved that feat by offering female audiences a positive experience, i.e. the spectacle of a woman stronger than all the men around her.

Lamarr never again received a comparable role in a big budget film. In *Copper Canyon* (1950), a western, she plays a character who is only a shadow of her former star image, even if the superficial signs are the same. As Lisa Roselle, she is madam of a whorehouse in the old West, shortly after the Civil War. It features a typical western narrative, pitting monopoly capitalists against the workers, copper mining magnates from the North against southern miners. It is indeed just a variation on the proverbial rangers-versus-sheepherders, mixed with an equally stereotypical post-Civil War narrative. At first Lisa seems to be independent enough, rebuffing the advances of an oily deputy sheriff, but it turns out that she is in cahoots with the bad guys (northern mine owners). Only after she falls in love with the southern hero, a former officer of the Confederacy (Ray Milland totally miscast), does she begin to act nobly. He, however, mistrusts her with good reason, and it is only after she throws herself at his feet in subservience that she is allowed to ride off into the sunset with him. Her transformation may or may not be credible, but it hardly matters, because she merely serves as a love interest in a western, addressed to a mostly male audience, who apparently did not shun the film.

In the 1950s, Hedy Lamarr was seen in only a handful of films, appearing more often in the pages of the gossip columns. Extended stays in Mexico, Italy, and Houston, due to various husbands and lovers, distanced her from Hollywood in terms of geography and, more importantly, access to its power base. Her films were either independently produced in Rome or low budget Hollywood studio pictures, in any case at the margins of the industry. Even television appearances, a haven for many film actors less than fully employed) were rare. Fortunately, Lamarr lived long enough to be honored for her film career, e.g. her hometown of Vienna organized a major retrospective in 1999. With her death on 21 January 2000, a reevaluation of her life and career has begun. Certainly, she was never a great acting talent, but for a brief period she enjoyed the kind of film career only few film actresses achieve. And in terms of her earnings, the true measure of success in America, she belonged to the privileged few.

As recent research into film stars has demonstrated, the construction and nurturing of a star image is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. It is dependent on the conditions of production in the film studios and their attached publicity departments, the on-screen persona, made up of individual roles that gel together in the public sphere to a composite picture, the off-screen image, based on studio gossip and publicity, available biographical facts, the star's reception in the press and among audiences, as well as the cultural, social, and political context. In this essay I have advanced

the notion that Hedy Lamarr was successful in the 1940s, because her star image of the independent, sexually aggressive woman who sees gender relations in terms of a marketplace of desire, spoke to contemporary female audiences, while her extreme physical beauty attracted male audiences. While Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's publicity machine successfully advanced a particular star image, Lamarr on her own by the late 1940s and all of the 1950s was responsible for her own publicity and as a consequence much more susceptible to the whims of the press.

Thus it seems likely that Lamarr's career went into eclipse for both internal and external reasons, i.e. the changing context of reception and the evolving structure of the Hollywood studio system. Whether another studio was willing to put her under contract or she wished to remain independent, as she claimed in her memoirs, is unclear, but the power of the studios was waning in any case by the 1950s. It is also possible her reputation as being too independent and difficult was catching up with her. In any case, Lamarr seems to have had a penchant for burning bridges: in 1933 when she converted to Catholicism; in 1937 when she left her husband; in 1950, when she sold all of her worldly possessions in a very public auction, demonstratively leaving Hollywood in order to move to Mexico; in 1955, when she moved to Texas. However, the external difficulties could have been overcome, but the film industry had moved on, a relic of the pre-World War II era, a victim of capital's planned obsolescence for the film industry actors, thus keeping the cost of productions down.

Her star image was out of synch with changing social mores and fashion. The 1940s heyday of fiery brunettes (see also Joan Bennett) had once again given way to a regime of passive blondes. With the arrival of Marilyn Monroe, the blond *par excellence*, American males once again fell prey to their intense mammary fixation. As early as 1938, a magazine writer had noted that Lamarr's breasts were a bit too small, her backside a bit too large.<sup>11</sup> Her European accent may have also been a factor in her falling stock, given the fact that both Marlene Dietrich and Ingrid Bergman suffered a similar drop in popularity in the late 1940s/early 1950s, both only recovering at the end of the decade in character roles. Certainly Lamarr might also have been able to segue into character roles, but the barely forty-year-old Lamarr probably thought herself too young for that.

Today all that remains are her films, many of which are available commercially on video, while most of the rest play regularly on television. As has been demonstrated here, most are better and more interesting than their reputation suggests, if only due to the presence of Hedy Lamarr. On the screen she remains not only intensely beautiful, but also consistently intelligent, making her modern once more.

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9. Lamarr, p. 12.

10. *Newsweek*, 28 November 1949, p. 72.

11. Kyle Crichton, "Escape to Hollywood," *Collier's*, 5 November 1938, p. 14, writes: "She is rather large of limb and has somewhat too much in the rear and somewhat not enough in the front..."



# I WONDER WHATEVER BECAME OF ME?

## A NOTE ON THE MARX BROTHERS

Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

—Emma Lazarus, inscription on The Statue of Liberty

Ever since I started seeing the Marx Brothers' films in the 1930s (the later ones at first, alas!), I've been wondering what was so special about them and why they've lasted so magnificently, with an endurance equalled, in comedy, only by silent films such as those of Laurel & Hardy and—nowadays with a good many reservations—of Charlie Chaplin. Other comic talkies of the 1930s, mostly of the "screwball" variety, have also lasted well, but always, I think—as in the case of, say, *The Awful Truth* or *Bringing Up Baby*—because they were about something, usually intimate man/woman relationships. But the Marx Brothers' films can hardly be described as being obviously "about" anything at all. Of course, one might characterise *The Cocoanuts* (1929) and *Animal Crackers* (1930) as being "satires" on High Society just before and during the Wall Street Crash: but no-one could reasonably claim that Cunard or The Mob would have been justified in suing the makers of *Monkey Business* (1931) for misrepresenting life on passenger liners and the true nature of gangsters, or that *Horse Feathers* (1932) gives us the low-down on the American system of Tertiary education, which was doubtless, like most such systems, beyond satire anyway. Many writers, including the admirable Joe Adamson (*Groucho, Harpo, Chico and Sometimes Zeppo*, London 1974) discuss *Duck Soup* (1933) as being direct political satire—possibly (but none too probably) meaning that, in the arraignment of Chico for espionage, it anticipates Hitler's Reichstag Fire trial by several months and Stalin's Treason Trials by four years: a truly prophetic achievement... But, sarcasm apart, I'm still, seventy-two years after their first film was released, wondering why the Marx Brothers' movies endure. Aren't they pretty meaningless, apart from mere jokes like "You're heading for a breakdown—why don't you pull yourself to pieces?"? Can pointless things be amusing (if at all) more than evanescently? What, really, are the Marx Brothers' films about?

First, to make some basic distinctions, which I think are generally accepted these days: the films which the Marxes made after they went over

by **Tony French**










*A Night at the Opera*: population increase in Groucho's cabin.

to MGM in 1935 (and after Zeppo left the act) show the new studio's complete misunderstanding of their art, an incomprehension which was made acceptable, in the first two at least, by the glossy genius of Irving Thalberg. Thalberg, having supervised *A Night at the Opera* (1935), died during the making of *A Day at the Races* (1937), and thereafter the Marx Brothers' films went into a steep decline, though they trickled on for another decade (one must expunge *Room Service* and *Love Happy* from one's mind. Apart from the general tiredness of the humour, the glitzy "production numbers" and the facile New Deal optimism, the MGM films look all wrong: they are so expertly-photographed (in one sense)

that they give one the impression of taking place in the real world, or at least MGM's brylcreemed idea of it, whereas the Paramount films float the freer from mundane reality by virtue of their very crudity, and Groucho's grease-paint moustache is entirely in keeping with the unreality of just about everything else. The MGM Brothers' personae have also changed fundamentally: they are now trying to help young lovers instead of sedulously disembowelling the whole idea of conventional bourgeois "love." There are plenty of hilarious sequences (five per film was Dr Thalberg's prescription), but for the most part they are merely funny. There is perhaps a sense in which, in





viewers' minds, the earlier films have been assimilated to, even absorbed by, the later. In my view the authentic Marx canon comprises only the five films made for Paramount between 1929 and 1933, all of which I've already mentioned. I shall only discuss these.

In four of them, Groucho plays an authority-figure of some kind: in *The Cocoanuts* he is a hotel-manager, in *Animal Crackers* a celebrated guest at a weekend party given by a Society hostess in her upper-crust mansion, in *Horse Feathers* the President of a College, while by the time we get to *Duck Soup* he has graduated to being the President of a country, Fredonia. In *Monkey Business*, however, he is a mere stowaway on an ocean liner, and we see that he can disrupt proceedings just as efficiently from below as from above. One sequence in *Monkey Business* gives us, I think, a usefully direct way into the themes and concerns of all these films, even though a noun as poshly literary-critical as "theme" will doubtless seem impossibly po-faced when applied to comedies whose main interest is often described as being their "mayhem" or "madness" or, a little more upmarketly, "surrealism." In *Monkey Business* the liner on which the four stowaways are travelling, and round whose decks they have been ruthlessly if incompetently hunted throughout the voyage, reaches that El Dorado of all immigrants, New York—its skyline is clearly visible,—and they try to disembark. But they have no passports, are "illegals," and the sequence I am thinking of (42' into the film—timings henceforth given to the nearest minute) shows their attempts to insult the Customs and Immigration officials into believing that they do have identities and can therefore be allowed to land, although we do not know, and never find out, why they want to, the film's assumption obviously being that no-one needs a reason to want to get into the U.S.A. (Contrast *A Night at the Opera*, where much exposition is wasted on a pretext for the Brothers to cross the Atlantic—it comes to look like a mere excuse for the immortal Stateroom scene).

Zeppo, after the others have made unsuccessful attempts to steal other people's passports, has got hold of Maurice Chevalier's, and the Brothers, each in turn flaunting his incompetence, try to pass themselves off as Chevalier, by 1931 well-known in America and with many films to his credit. That is, they impersonate a European with an already-established identity. But since none of them looks remotely like the photo in the passport, each has to pretend to establish his credentials by singing one of the Frenchman's songs ("If ze nightingales sang like you/ Zey'd sing much sweeter zan zey do..."), a method of identification that the Immigration officials seem prepared to accept if it sounds convincing. Zeppo and Chico are easy to dismiss, of course, and Groucho does such a savagely absurd travesty of Chevalier's style and demeanour that he cuts no more ice than they do. But Harpo, ordered to produce his *passport*, produces first a piece of *pasteboard* and then a *washboard* and then, having reduced the officials' carefully-arranged documents to chaos by throwing them about in handfuls, gives vent to an amazingly good imitation of Chevalier's voice—but it turns out to come from a tiny portable gramophone he

has strapped on his back, so he is rejected too, though not before he has thrown more papers around and rubber-stamped an immigration official's bald head, hitherto virgin and no doubt unconscious of any need to have its authenticity certified. The immigration officials are left a helpless rabble, as if they were the illegals.

The humour, much more cuttingly spontaneous in its contempt for the very authority that needs placating than the episode with the plain-clothes detective Henderson in *A Night at the Opera*, is positively vindictive, and one may reflect that both Marx parents had left Europe for America and that, in the great 6 days of immigration from Europe between the 1880s and the Great War, immigrants were landed at Ellis Island in New York Harbour and subjected to sundry indignities, many of which arose from the migrants' ignorance of English and their consequent inability to understand what was being asked of them: early newsreel clips (reproduced in recent documentaries) of new arrivals being "processed" make that distressingly clear and show, too, the brutal perfunctoriness of the medical examination each had to undergo... in *Monkey Business* the Marx Brothers get off the liner not by acquiring identities but by all four pretending to be one sick patient and hiding under a blanket on a stretcher.

Looking at the rest of the film in the light of such ideas about being and identity, we notice that no-one and nothing in it manages to keep a stable self or nature for long, till eventually one's sense of reality is positively reeling. A photographer's tripod-camera (in the "interview" with "Frenchie" the opera singer—I have to keep on using inverted commas!) turns out to be Harpo under a cloak, the interview itself peters out into insulting nullity, Chico and Harpo "examine" Frenchie as if she were the person who has fainted ("Oh you fools, I'm not the patient!" Chico: "Well, we're not the doctors"). Chico and Harpo, employed as bodyguards by Helton, are baffled when the man (actually a whole succession of wrong men) they have been following round the decks turns out to be an old fellow with a painfully genuine white beard. At the Punch and Judy show for kids, Harpo becomes first a character in the show; then something alternating between being within it and outside it, which makes the Captain accuse the First Officer (who has identified Harpo as one of the stowaways) of "drinking again" and makes the children laugh because they innocently see him as wholly part of the illusion (which?); then as completely separate from himself, as he sturdily helps the two Officers to tug off what is apparently his own leg, before he rides out of the playroom on a toy train, hooting, tooting and (because he has a frog in his hat) croaking. Much later, the bustle on a woman's dress at Joe Helton's fancy dress ball turns out to be Harpo again, the bustle at once attaching itself to another woman's rear-end and altering her somewhat for the worse.

In the stateroom sequence (19') with the gangster Alky Briggs's wife, Lucille/Thelma Todd, Groucho, using a combination of body-language and verbal dexterity, defeats both the girl's naively Jazz-Age expectations and, when Briggs comes back unexpectedly, his confident and stable Godfather dourness (as Joe Adamson points out, *op. cit.* p. 149), by sim-



ply refusing either to accept their set personae or to stay in one himself long enough to be pinned down. Thus, with Lucille he whirls from tailor to closet-seducer to orator to legal prosecutor to guitarist to divorce-lawyer to kindergarten kid to wild tangoist; and with Alky when he returns, from Confederate General to closet-housewife to tailor to quizmaster to child to barfly to (when Briggs threatens to "drill" him with his "gat") campy Dorothy Dixier... leaving Lucille and even more her conventionally sociopathic husband baffled to know how to categorise him and therefore how to deal with him: he has so many identities, as if he changed Tarnhelms every five seconds, that a man knows not where to have him. Alky tries to force him, along with Zeppo (who has arrived unannounced), into the stereotypical role of bodyguard, but both guards drown their "gats" in a convenient bucket—though for Alky they've thoughtfully saved a cute "little black gitten." Puns, after all, can be a way of undermining to the point of vertiginous stupor any trust we may have left in our principal means of human communication—words and their reliability, even meaningfulness. It is not merely that puns like the Marx Brothers' fool around irresponsibly with words, but that (at their most inspired, anyway) they wrench a given utterance into a totally different and utterly irrelevant frame of discourse, depriving it—to come back to the starting-point for this part of my essay—of all reliable identity and of the possibility of its ever re-acquiring any. Groucho, a few moments later chancing on Briggs's rival as a gangster, Joe Helton, who is quietly reading in a deck-chair, also leaves him wondering what sort of world he inhabits if it contains a being who makes him this sort of offer (if that's what it is): "I'll be your new bodyguard. In case I'm going to attack you I'll have to be there to defend you too. Now, let me know when you want to be attacked and I'll be there ten minutes later to defend you." "I'll think it over," says Helton, dazed.

In *Monkey Business*, then, the Marx Brothers are migrant outcasts who take on and defeat authority. Their means are subversion, irrelevance and a downright refusal to play any game according to the rules or to admit that there are any rules, or to set up apparent rules and proceed to demolish them. Groucho even shows the native-speakers that he can do more with their language—that most precious and most defining possession of the indigenous—than they can, and that he has no respect whatever for their ethnicity, snarling at a white man at Helton's party who is dressed as what in those days was called a Red Indian, "If you don't like our country, why don't you go back where you came from?" If the best method of defence is proverbially attack, the best method of overcoming your migrant insecurity is obviously rampant aggressiveness... provided you are good and quick enough, so you have to be good enough and quick enough.

The Brothers, taking on "properly"-constituted authority, expose its basis as being the pursuit of money, power, food and sex—references to these two last abound throughout their earlier films and are also, of course, among the drives that migrants recognise in themselves. But they also take on the kind of counter-authority possessed by the gangsters, an authority which the powers-that-be recognise as having its

own peculiar kind of legitimacy. Somewhat similarly, "the Professor" in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* takes on a police-force which regards burglars as perfectly normal (if mistaken) members of society—merely the other side of the coin—but simply cannot fit a genuine anarchist, who recognises no rules at all, into its highly conventional frame of discourse and doesn't know what to do with him or about him. Of course the explosive charge that the Professor carries around with him is literal, not figurative; but in Marx Brothers' films Margaret Dumont, faced with Groucho's shattering rudeness (though not in *Monkey Business*), simply cannot accommodate it within any social code she knows, so she looks vaguely and/or haughtily away and pretends that nothing has happened, that no perlocutionary act has taken place. In this way of coping with the unmanageable, she is at one with Captains, passengers, officials, guests and all the rest of the Establishment.

I've only left myself space to discuss properly two more of the Marx Brothers' Paramount films, *Animal Crackers* and *Duck Soup*—the former in part because it was out of circulation for twenty years owing to absurd legal problems and in part simply because it is one of my three favourites. It has an astonishingly literate script: what other film now (or then?) would refer to "using the subjunctive instead of the past tense" or to putting an accent "on the penultimate, not on the diphthonic" or include a burlesque of Eugene O'Neill? It is in all ways much better than the hopelessly crude and lumbering *The Cocoanuts*, in which Groucho surprisingly ruins many of his lines by gabbling them as if reading them off idiot-boards, and is not helped by the atrocious sound-track. I admit that *Animal Crackers* isn't, even by the rather rudimentary standards of 1930, a particularly good work of filmic art: it is virtually a Broadway show directed for the screen with a kind of dogged literal-mindedness by Victor Heerman. Filmically, it is easily surpassed by the first two-thirds of *Horse Feathers*—but that collapses abjectly after Connie Bailey (the College Widow)/Thelma Todd is drowned to the sound of a small guitar, or otherwise disappears from the drama.

I'll start on *Animal Crackers* by concentrating on the two episodes concerned with the affluent, heavily-accented, very "European" art-patron, Roscoe W. Chandler/Louis Sorin, whose exhibiting of "Beaugard's" eighteenth-century painting "After the Hunt" is one of Mrs Rittenhouse's/Margaret Dumont's two pretexts for throwing the house-party in the first place, the other being the return from Africa of the famous explorer Captain Jeffrey Spaulding/Groucho Marx. The episodes begin at 26' into the film: the first is with Chico and Harpo, the second with Groucho. Ravelli/Chico is sure he has seen Chandler before somewhere. Is his name Ishker Bibble? Has Chico seen him in Sing-Sing, perhaps? Leavenworth? No, says Chandler, this cannot be: I spend most of my time in Europe. Ah, Europe!, says Chico, I know—Czechoslovakia. I know you, you used to be Abie the fish-peddler! Harpo joins in the assault and, throwing Chandler to the ground, they discover conclusive proof—a birthmark on his right arm. He "confesses" (note the verb), they threaten him with exposure, and he is so perturbed at the thought that



Mrs Rittenhouse and her guests might find out who he really is that he offers them a bribe—\$500—but that's not enough, so Chico starts chanting "Abie the fish-man" while Harpo mimics a newsboy selling papers. Chandler ups his offer to \$5,000, handing them a cheque, but it (literally) bounces. Harpo and Chico, having stolen his tie, let him flee up the Art Deco staircase, Harpo then revealing that he's even taken Chandler's/Abie's birthmark as well: it is now on his arm.

Thus the wretched Roscoe W. Chandler has, in less than three minutes, lost—at the hands and in the eyes of a fake Italian immigrant and a character who seems alien not merely to the country but also to the planet—not only his acquired name and standing but also his innate identity and even its physical mark of identification. Thus stripped, he is easy prey for Groucho in the second episode, which follows on immediately. Groucho goes on the attack at once, of course, and, after he has got their names temporarily sorted out, ridicules Chandler for his tielessness and, it turns out, his lack of "garters" (suspenders) to hold up his socks, for Harpo and Chico have stolen them too... and anyway, Groucho opines, the socks look rather worn. Accordingly, Groucho rechristens Chandler "old socks," but the latter tries to ingratiate himself by laughing uproariously at a non-joke of his interrogator's who follows it up with a fresh round of introductions, including the information that the "T." in "Jeffrey T. Spaulding" stands for "Edgar."

Groucho now starts apparently trying to milk Chandler for some money to finance a scientific expedition, but no sooner does Chandler start asking some leading questions than it turns out that the "expedition" is in fact (in what?) Groucho's retirement. This naturally makes the discussion "drift" around to the subject of Art. Chandler, briefly regaining a degree of judicial poise, is asked his opinion of Art, only to have the (meaningless) question withdrawn the moment he starts groping for an answer. After receiving free advice to put his new Opera-House in Central Park "at night when no-one is looking" or, failing that, straight into the reservoir, Chandler—still (against all the odds and appearances) trying to conduct a rational conversation with someone to whom the very idea is patently alien—offers to give "his opinions," but is sidetracked by another exchange of handshaking introductions, which is followed by a further barrage of questions as to what he thinks about the traffic problem, the marriage problem, and what he thinks of at night when he goes to bed, "you beast!" Chandler now tries to change the subject (if that is the right noun) to finance, but his efforts are stultified by Groucho's advocacy of a 7c. nickel, abandoned as soon as Chandler says he thinks it's a good idea, in the process getting confused about whether he is Chandler or Spaulding, which in turn precipitates yet another series of mutual introductions and handshakes, followed by Groucho's invitation to "take the foreign situation" while he takes a "hot butter-scotch sundae on rye bread." Groucho then stalks off.

In this 4 1/2-minute conversation, he has completed the ruin of Chandler's identity started by Harpo and Chico, at any rate for the audience, since Chandler of course is not the sort of character who could realise what it is that has been

happening to him, and to whom, therefore, nothing much could happen: when he next appears he is as pompously intact and self-assured as ever. Maybe his powers of reinventing himself equal, in their complacently pedestrian way, Groucho's own: both, after all, are ways of dealing with the shattering of one's self, and later, after Groucho's African Lecture, Chandler heartily and sincerely calls for "three cheers" for him (which Harpo sight-punningly misinterprets as "three chairs," of course). Chandler's insensitivity is a kind of obtuse counterpart of Groucho's aggressive insolence. Similarly, the snub-proof Mrs Rittenhouse and Mrs Whitehead/Margaret Irving, in the bridge game (37') with Harpo and Chico, totally fail to grasp that their opponents are not merely playing in a different convention or using a different form of bidding, but are playing without rules of any intelligible kind: Harpo takes four successive tricks with the same two aces and Chico comments thoughtfully, "He plays a good game." Nor, in Spaulding's proposal scene (19') can the same two women take in the fact that they are being grossly and inventively insulted when he proposes marriage first to one, then to the other, and then to both, interspersing his declarations of love with three bizarre send-ups of Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* (1928—filmed by Irving Thalberg a couple of years after *Animal Crackers*, with his wife Norma Shearer in the lead!), together with repeated demands for money—always in close proximity to sex in Groucho's mind, his sexual politics being well in advance of his time, or perhaps just franker. He ends by collapsing monogamy into the Eighteenth Amendment (1919—"Prohibition")—"it was put over on the American people while our boys were Over There . . ." And come to think of it, monogamy is a form of Prohibition: but could anyone have meant this in 1930?

So Groucho may seem, from the start, to have made himself invulnerable to the pressures of the American Establishment and its hangers-on, by treating both WASP and non-WASP, Mrs Rittenhouse and Roscoe W. Chandler, with a contempt which would border on the sadistic if they were smart enough to realise how they were being undermined. Yet maybe he is not so invulnerable after all, for while his logical illogic is a deliberate strategy for unsettling the opposition, it is quite nonplussed when it encounters forms of irrationality that arise not in the world of the American Establishment but in his own. The great interloper is himself interloped. Jamison/Zeppo (Spaulding's "Field-Secretary") checkmates his boss not by Chico-like subversion, but by excision. In the episode of the dictated letter (69'), Groucho, furious with Jamison for not having told him about the stolen painting ("You're a contemptible cur! Oh, if I were a man you'd resent that"), dictates a letter to his solicitors which is probably not much more nonsensical than most letters sent to, or by, solicitors, but we must recall that this is a special case. At the end Jamison remarks that "you said a lot of things here that I didn't think were important, so I just omitted them." To this the only possible reply is Groucho's suggestion that he make two carbon copies and throw them both away. Cutting smartness, however devious, is no match for contempt masquerading as incompetence.






*Animal Crackers*: Hostess Margaret Dumont slightly perturbed by unruly guests.

Chico's devastating illogic, on the other hand, arises from a pleasingly natural, genial and spontaneous stupidity, and it defeats Groucho's at every turn. That the smart do not possess and shall not inherit the earth is seen clearly in the episode where Chico and Groucho try (82') to work out who can have been guilty of the overnight theft of the Beaugard painting and the substitution for it of a very inferior copy—a burglary that gives the film what little "plot" it has (contrast the later, MGM, films, which are overburdened with story-lines that are both dull in themselves and also get nowhere slowly).

In this episode with Chico, Groucho finds himself in the novel and highly unwelcome position of virtually playing straight-man to Chico's clownish disrupter—Roscoe W.

Chandler, as it were, to Ravelli's Captain Spaulding. While Groucho's usual method of disconcerting the opposition (= just about everyone) is to create a series of ever-expanding asymmetrical semantic ripples travelling at different speeds to no foreseeable destination, Chico's is to create a series of imploding ripples that repeatedly get back to their starting-point and disappear down it. Thus, he takes some minutes to establish the premise from which the conversation has already started anyway, viz. that a painting has been stolen, and that the thief's motive was almost certainly robbery. All we need to do, says Chico triumphantly, is to ask everyone in the house if they took it, and if no-one there took it, we'll have to go to the house next door. But suppose, says Groucho





(ever the worrier, always raising difficulties) there isn't one? Well then, we'll just have to build one, Chico brings out with the air of one announcing that  $E=mc^2$ . This idea appeals to Groucho's sense of irrelevance and he takes it up with enthusiasm, only to find himself bogged down in details of the architecture and layout of the new house, which they sketch out (invisibly, since it doesn't exist) on the table they're sitting at. The house turns out to be so intelligently constructed that when you walk through the door you are outside and can't get back in because you had no right to go out in the first place. For the first time in the film a look of something like desperation begins to steal over Groucho's features, intensified when he learns that the roof is kept in the cellar so as not to get wet and that to reach the maid's room he'll have to go through Chico's. The "painting" of the non-existent house (cerise? blue?) gets hopelessly confused with the painting that has been stolen, which Chico can now no more remember than he is any longer quite sure of Groucho's identity although, once reminded, he does come up with the solution of the mystery: the Beaugard painting was eaten by left-handed moths. Writhing with frustration, Groucho announces he's going to get a writ of Habeas Corpus. But his words are turned to agonised groans by Chico's mishearing (feebly mimicked by his bafflement over "duplicates" in the contract scene in *A Night at the Opera*) of "Habeas Corpus" as "Abie's Irish Rose," the title of a popular play of the 'twenties in which a Jewish boy marries an Irish Catholic immigrant girl, with, one gathers from reference-books, a comic treatment of the clash of religions and ethnicities—filmed as a silent movie in 1928 and, produced in 1946 by Bing Crosby, as a turkey.

Thus Spaulding and Ravelli, starting from a purloined artwork of the European dix-huitième, have proceeded through a fictitious but desiderated and personally-designed dwelling place, to leftist moths, to a drama about a painful (if at times funny) "racial" conflict. The writers of the original Broadway version of *Animal Crackers*—Kaufman, Ruby, Kalmar and Ryskind (only the last is credited with the Screen Play as such)—may have "intended" to write a frothy and money-spinning comedy to show off the talents of "those talented cutups," as Alexander Woollcott called the Marx Brothers on the occasion of their first great theatrical success in 1924 ("Hilarious antics spread Good Cheer at The Casino"). But what these writers actually created, in collaboration with the Marx Brothers, and of course unthinkable without them, is fuelled and driven, as perhaps all great humour is, by the most radical of insecurities. Interestingly, it is in *Duck Soup* when Groucho has assumed his most powerful and authoritarian role, and even Harpo and Chico have ceased to be "displaced," that the insecurities become most fundamental and the humour most unsettling. For after all, immigrants may well find that the new country that has assimilated them is really no great improvement on the one they had thought they had left behind forever—even when one of them becomes President of it—and that the best thing they can do is to subvert it from within. We note that the word which causes Groucho to explode is "upstart," and that at one point

he plaintively asks, "I wonder whatever became of me?" And we may also note that the Austrian Hitler, a few months before the shooting of the film started, had become Chancellor of Germany, in the wake of the total collapse of the banking system in central Europe. I don't want to press this analogy—certainly not in any literal sense, since no-one in Germany or anywhere else in Europe could, when the movie was shot, have had the least idea of what Hitler would turn out to be; and, later, we have Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* to remind us that the real Hitler, however fantastically treated, was simply not funny. In any case, the general condition of almost all the world in 1933—four years after the Wall Street crash glanced at in the Eugene O'Neill send-ups in *Animal Crackers*—must have seemed to suggest a planet that had gone completely off its head and to provide confirmation in ordinary civil life of the sense soldiers of all nationalities had drawn from the Great War, when they were fighting "Over There," that the nineteenth century's "certain certainties" had gone for ever.

At all events, *Duck Soup* starts out, after some very economical introductory shots (2') of Fredonia's national flag, dirndled happy peasant girls, etc., from the premise that the nation is bankrupt. The wealthy Mrs Teasdale/Margaret Dumont promises to lend Fredonia the huge sum it needs to stay solvent only on condition that Rufus T. Firefly/Groucho Marx is appointed President (a hint possibly picked up by René Clair for *Le Dernier Milliardaire* a year later). And there at once follows a superbly-executed sequence (only 11') of the pompous Inauguration of the new President and the Machiavellian plan of Trentino/Louis Calhern, ambassador of neighbouring Sylvania, to discredit Firefly by having the sultry Vera Marcal/Raquel Torres compromise him, himself marry Mrs Teasdale and thus take over a country which, one reflects, no one in his senses would want anyway—a wry pun on the notion of "conquest." (Trentino's attempt to compromise Firefly comes to nothing, but less elaborately than the corresponding intrigue using Esther Muir in *A Day at the Races*.) But no sooner is the set-up for His Excellency's first entrance completed, in a stagily conventional way, with the hussars' upraised swords framing the entrance to the great Hall after girls in tutus have scattered rose-petals on the marble floor, than... nothing happens, the sabred arch remaining empty. We then have the entry of the new President from behind the assembled *corps diplomatique* and beplumed guard of honour (down a fireman's pole, what's more, creating a sense of spatial disorientation like that given by the weirdest of Mannerist paintings). Firefly's contempt for his new job is complete, and so is his inability to make even a pretence of taking it seriously. Indeed, he doesn't seem willing even to start: his first words to Mrs Teasdale are "take a card... You can keep it, I've got 51 left," thus emphasising the element not just of chance but in fact of the whole procedure's utter randomness, a thought (if it can be called that) continued in his bewilderingly insulting flirtation with Mrs Teasdale, whom he accuses of making advances to him after having murdered her husband by kissing him; trying to touch Trentino for \$20 million and, failing that, \$12 till pay-day;






*Duck Soup*: Rufus T. Firefly celebrates his inauguration as President of Fredonia.

demonstrating some fancy footwork to Vera Marcal ("here's one [one what? we wonder] I picked up in a dance-hall"), then making a pass at her by comparing her to a herd of cows; and dictating a letter to his dentist. When Mrs Teasdale announces that the eyes of the world are upon him, he plays hopscotch; then singingly (between verses howling in a tuneless falsetto) announces the "laws of [his] administration," which mostly consist of having people imprisoned or put up against a wall and shot for practically anything but in particular for enjoying themselves. He ends by announcing his

open intention of embezzling as much as he can—"If you think this country's bad off now,/ Just wait till I get through with it." He ends with a nautical song or two and pipes on a bo'sun's whistle.

I don't know whether, in 1933, all of this, especially the "political" programme, would have seemed so preposterous as to be merely silly, but I am often visited by the suspicion that *Duck Soup*, like Shakespeare's *Richard III*, is a work whose inner meaning has been very slow to unfold itself, if indeed it has fully done so even yet: rather as the esoteric Sibylline





prophecies of the Ancient World tended, in the fullness of time, to come true in appallingly unexpected ways. Be that as it may, what is striking about this long Inauguration sequence is the perfect co-ordination of image, music, mise-en-scène and montage: all together giving a restless, unnerving effect. Throughout, there is constant cutting from face to face and angle to angle—not as brilliant as in the “We’re going to war” sequence near the end, but the Inauguration episode hardly calls for it. As the cameraman seems not to have been well-known (my reference-books give him no separate listing), I can only assume that the creative mind at work here is that of the director, Leo McCarey—which, in view of the other films he made, seems highly likely.

The other episodes I must make space to talk about because leaving them out would leave my account of *Duck Soup* inconclusive (but any account is inevitably inconclusive) are as follows: (1) the events leading up to the mirror sequence in Mrs Teasdale’s house (43’-47’); then (2) the concerted musical number when the Fredonians decide to go to war (51’-55’); and last of all (3) the final war scenes (57’ ad fin.).

Harpo and Chico have become Sylvanian spies, working for Trentino, and have thus joined an Establishment, though on the opposite side to Groucho’s (if he can be said to have a side at all). Harpo, dressed up as we know Groucho to be, in a nightshirt and nightcap, is trying to find the plans of war without drawing attention to himself by making any noise. He mistakes a radio with a large front dial for the safe in which the plans are said to be kept and, trying to open it, turns it on. It bursts into a frantic rendition of “The Stars and Stripes Forever” (just what you would expect to hear on the wireless in the middle of the night in a small European country), and when Harpo tries to turn it off the knob comes off in his hand. He shooshes it frantically as though it were a baby whose howling was disturbing the neighbours, unsuccessfully muffles it in layers of blankets and rugs, tries to extinguish it with a soda-siphon as if it were a fire, shuts it in the next room like a naughty child, but since it is still perfectly audible brings it out again and dashes it to pieces on the floor, batters it viciously with an Art Deco ashtray on a long stem and in the end despairingly throws it out of the window, where it crashes into what sound like cucumber-frames. “Mice,” opines Firefly to Mrs Teasdale. This time it is the radio, not Harpo as in *Monkey Business*, that has taken to playing a bewildering variety of roles, neatly turning the tables, as you would expect to happen to someone who has himself joined (however incompetently) the powers-that-be.

Role-reversal, in the mirror sequence (or rather the non-mirror sequence since it has been smashed, making a certain amount of extra noise), now becomes attempted role-identity, as Harpo tries to convince Groucho that he is seeing his own reflection in the mirror (and behind the supposed mirror another, identical, room), and to this end goes through a perfectly fantastic series of mimicries, at some junctures doing what his *Doppelgänger* is going to do before he does it, and at one point actually walking round him, as if mirrors and the spatial world they imply were as fluid as in, say, Jean

Cocteau’s *Orphée*, but a good deal more entertaining than anything in that solemn piece of mindless Gallic intellectualism. A semblance of reality—if by now we are in any position to say what “reality” is—returns only when Chico, also dressed in a nightshirt, appears next to Harpo, so that Groucho is seeing double, though one may well wonder why he can’t swallow that illusion, too.

All three Brothers are now caught up in the problems of actually belonging to something. After the trial of Chico (which has some of weakest dialogue in the film), Groucho’s working himself into a fury over the mere possibility that Trentino will reject Mrs Teasdale’s offer of mediation (50’) comes perilously close to the realities of everyday diplomacy in the real world (even, or particularly, today), and the film only pulls itself apart again in the superbly filmic “Going to War” sequence (51’). I haven’t space to discuss this in any detail, but in a series of brilliant intercut shots the Marxes, now dissociating themselves from the patriotic nonsense they have conned themselves (up to a point) into endorsing, manage to reduce to absurdity many of the musical manifestations of popular culture that had been presented in 1920s musicals, including the sacrosanct predecessor of Country and Western music, together with drum majorettes, spirituals from the (supposed) Old South, the sort of barn-dance beloved of John Ford—and (just how symbolically?) by their clipping the plumes off the parading soldiers’ helmets.

In the final scene, in the ruined cottage that serves for a Headquarters, all three Brothers, after recapitulating half-a-dozen different military uniforms (a counterpart to the recapitulation of American popular music mentioned a moment ago), start hurling fruit not only at Trentino but, finally, at Mrs Teasdale when she starts singing the National Anthem of Fredonia (“Land of the Free!”) with a self-irony the more hideous for being completely unintentional. Trentino and Mrs Teasdale, the Establishment figures, despite their different nationalities, are really on the same side: they deserve to be pelted with rotten apples. The interlopers have loped back into nihilism, into their non-side—their proper element: neither Over There, nor Over Here, but Over Where?

Over Where? is a strange place. Visiting it, as the Marx Brothers compel us to, reminds us forcibly that, as W.B. Yeats put it,

Civilisation is hooped together, brought  
Under a rule, under the semblance of peace  
By manifold illusion... (“Meru”)

It is the distinction of the Marx Brothers, in their best—their most alarmingly and ferociously funny—films, to expose again and again the fragility, even perhaps the futility, of that illusion and yet, by the violent ease with which they shatter it, even when they have temporarily become part of it, to insist, in a paradoxical and perhaps self-defeating way, on its necessity. That is why their best work lives on today—a whole lifetime after the specific social, economic and political conditions from which it emerged have long since passed away.



by Tarja Laine

# JIM CARREY

## THE KING OF EMBARRASSMENT

Fun houses are sociologically provocative because they are not necessarily funny. Halls of distorting mirrors are methodologically appealing sites for an inquiry into emotional process. What does it take to make the mirrors funny? And what meaning do people take from the experience?

(Katz 1999: 87)

In his study on 'Families and funny mirrors', Jack Katz argues that even though humor is natural to the fun house setting, it is far from inevitable: the fun house visitors must 'work' in order to construct the emotion of joy.<sup>1</sup> Starting from the assumption that emotions are on the one hand a force beyond one's control and, on the other hand, an experience that is personally and idiosyncratically shaped, Katz describes fun house laughter as a three-phase process. First, the experience of the distorted image in the funny mirror has to be shared with someone else. Second, the distorted image must create a dynamic tension between a person as depicted by the mirror and that person's presumptively normal identity. And third, the laughter is often accompanied by certain bodily practices: this marks the shift from 'doing laughter' to a phase of being 'done by' humor.<sup>2</sup>

In this article I will study the star image of Jim Carrey as a kind of distorting mirror image. Like the fun houses, Carrey is sociologically provocative because his comic art is based on shame and embarrassment created by a tension built in social interaction.<sup>3</sup> I will argue that embarrassment is a characteristic feature in Carrey's star vehicles—within and beyond the film frame – and that embarrassment defines both Carrey's uniqueness as a star and his role as a successor of the comedians like Jerry Lewis.

According to Steven Shavero, comedy most commonly liberates through aggression: the comedian achieves a kind of self-redemption by

1 Katz 1999: 87.

2 Katz 1999: 91-2.

3 Even though—to the surprise of many— in the past few years Carrey has moved from adolescent 'poop and fart' humour like in the films *Ace Ventura*, *Pet Detective* (Tom Shadyac, 1994) and *Dumb & Dumber* (Peter Farrelly, 1994) to more serious roles, in the films like *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998) and *Man on the Moon* (Milos Forman, 1999). Lately the public figure and the star image of Jim Carrey have even raised academic interest, from the standpoint of body politics. Vivian Sobchack, for instance, has studied Carrey's image in *The Mask* (Chuck Russell, 1994) as 'hysterical body' in *Andere Sinema* 142/1997 and Kari Salminen as 'indiscreet body' in his article "Improperly Somatic" in *Filmihullu* 4-5/1997.







getting to square her/his account with her/his tormentors, or simply by violating and overturning social taboos.<sup>4</sup> Carrey's comedy, however, moves away from the liberating, ego-stabbing redemption to the production of more corporeal tension that manifests itself in the emotions of shame and embarrassment. Embarrassment functions as a threat to the coherence of the individual subjectivity, and brings it into the social frame of reference, under the gaze and judgement of others.<sup>5</sup>

This embarrassment is also shared, beyond the film frame, by the film audience through a process of identification. As Shaviro points out, this is not unrelated to one's embarrassment at having to defend one's enthusiasm for low-order slapstick comedy, because it implies a sense of being somehow associated with the antihero's idiotic misadventures.<sup>6</sup> I, for instance, have justified my passion for Carrey by creating a 'false pride' (the reverse side of shame) of it, and 'confessing' it before I could be judged for it. Embarrassment in Carrey's films, then, results in complicated, 'non-traditional' mechanisms of cinematic identification that always has a disturbing, awkward undertone.<sup>7</sup> And whether the spectator can deal with this awkwardness or not, determines whether s/he can take pleasure from Carrey's films or not. To my purposes, therefore, is the second phase in Katz's description of the fun house laughter is the most relevant. In this second phase, the subject perceives a dynamic tension between her/his mirror image and her/his normal identity. Laughter emerges from a transformation into a positive expression of the potential for a *shameful* and *embarrassing* recognition that one has awkwardly failed to maintain an appropriate identity in front of the others.<sup>8</sup> Carrey's star image provides a similar, distorted image of the spectator her/himself, because s/he is invited to identify with and to see her/himself in Carrey on the screen.

### The monstrous masculine

Arthur Koestler has argued that humor is in its essence a simultaneous orientation to two or more inconsistent perspectives.<sup>9</sup> The laughter in the fun house works according to the same principle. According to Katz, the members of the Western society in general assume that they somehow naturally 'own' the images their bodies cast onto mirrors. In the fun house the image is, however, distorted. This draws the subject's attention to the juxtaposition between the alternative perspective in the mirror and their normative expectation about their body image in everyday social life. In the fun house, the subject draws out an embarrassing view of her/himself, after which s/he takes distance from it through laughter and amusement.<sup>10</sup>

This amusement arises though juxtaposition, from a dynamic tension built into social interaction. In the fun house the juxtaposition arises from the production of a bodily tension: the subject is shown her/his body in an embarrassing light. In a normal situation, we are able to alter our look to escape from the embarrassment or shame produced by our body mass. But in the fun house the embarrassing image is 'frozen'; there is a split between our lived body and the mirror image, and our look is suddenly not flexible enough to alter the mirror image. Therefore, the only means of escape from embarrassment is through laughter. After the liberating laugh

the body may be withdrawn from display and returned to its usual status. The force of the laughter in the fun house emerges thus from transformation out of another force that is already in progress, and that presses the subject towards embarrassment or shame.<sup>11</sup>

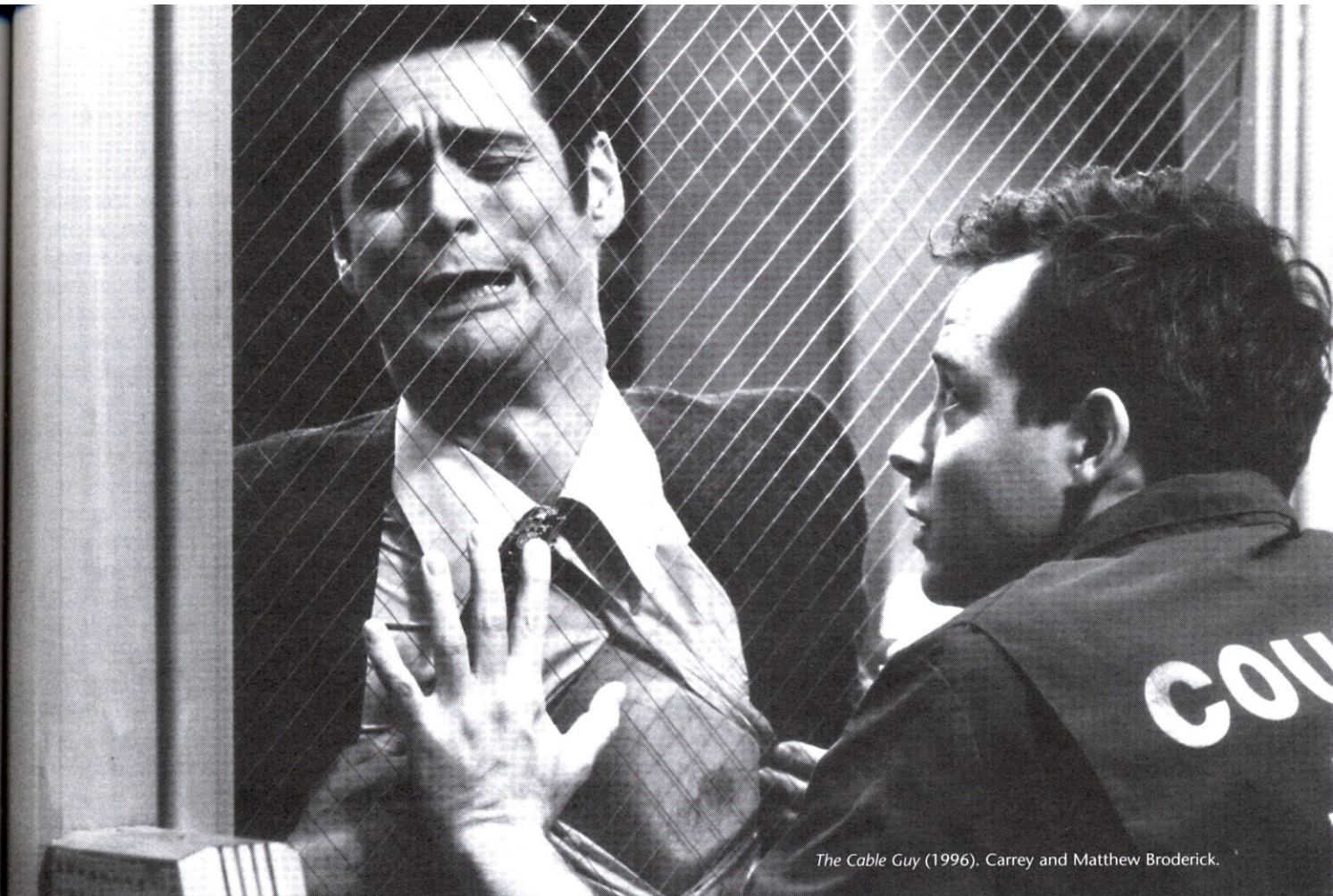
According to Jon Elster, beyond a certain level of satisfaction of material needs, our need for self-esteem and for the esteem of others, is more important for us than anything else. The withholding of the esteem can be intensely painful.<sup>12</sup> In shame and embarrassment, both the need for self-esteem and the need for esteem are frustrated. To think of oneself in degrading terms is bad enough, but the additional thought that the others *view* one in the same light is nearly intolerable. Hence we often do everything to avoid shame and, most obviously, the anticipation of shame acts as a powerful regulator of behavior.<sup>13</sup> Because shame and embarrassment are such painful emotions, their action tendency is also an immediate impulse to hide, to run away or to shrink; or, to avoid being seen. Yet in a situation where it is not possible to avoid being seen or to alter the shameful or embarrassing spectacle of oneself, shame sometimes desperately seeks metamorphosis into some other emotion, like amusement.<sup>14</sup> In the context of the comedy genre the laughter can therefore sometimes be seen created through juxtaposition in social interaction, which points itself to embarrassment, but which, through a metamorphosis, results in awkward joy.

The distorting mirrors create juxtaposition between what is normative and what is shameful, and place the viewer in between this juxtaposition, in a split. The comic art of Jim Carrey is based on the same kind of juxtaposition. Carrey is the distorted mirror image in the framework of normative behavior, through which we all evaluate our actions, feelings and behavior, as well as the actions, feeling and behavior of others. Both Carrey's star personality and the characters he mostly plays in his films usually violate the culturally accepted norms in every way, and in a way that would trigger the sense of shame or embarrassment in most of us. His voice is loud and his tones are exaggerated. His ecstatic face and gestures express alternately anger and sexual lust or tremendous joy and sorrow. He reacts overemotionally to everything and his emotions vary from one extreme to another. He uses wrong words in wrong situations and brings private things into public. For instance, in *The Cable Guy* (Ben Stiller, 1996) he plays Chip Douglas, who has been raised by television—Mr. Babysitter—and therefore his whole existence is as it were in a wrong context. His enthusiastic behavior, actions and ways of speaking would fit better in a talk-show or the shopping channel, while the dramatic nature of his emotional states would place him as a romantic character in a melodrama or even a psychopath in a horror film. His discourse consists merely of television clichés, and his behavior traits can be traced from game shows to sitcom, or from soap opera to reality programming. Therefore, his entire behavior is in a wrong framework from normal, everyday life.

In *Liar Liar* (Tom Shadyac, 1997) Carrey plays Fletcher Reese, a lawyer who, as a result of his son's birthday wish, is not able to tell a lie for 24 hours. Instead he is forced to always

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*The Cable Guy* (1996). Carrey and Matthew Broderick.

tell the truth, which situation most likely breaks all the rules of conduct and decency. For instance, when the judge asks him in the court how is he doing, he involuntarily answers: "I'm a little bit upset about a bad sexual episode I had last night." The contradiction becomes even more insurmountable, when his body takes over the tasks of his lying mind. As he is incapable of preventing himself from telling the truth, his body reacts by trying to save the situation, either by fleeing from the situations in which Reese would have to tell the truth or—indeed hysterically—by trying to draw the attention to itself, away from the naked truth. Eventually Reese loses the control both to his mind and to his body and, as a result, a courthouse drama turns into an opera full of madness, or a freak show, or even a football match.

How does the spectator respond to such scenes? One's first response would perhaps be to reject them as being tasteless, vulgar and infantile: many of us perhaps find themselves too sophisticated to really be amused at Carrey's character Lloyd Christmas lighting his breaking wind in *Dumb and Dumber*. Yet his behavior can also be seen providing a carnivalesque release from the usual standards of conduct by directly violating the rules of social respectability. As Shaviro points out, it is precisely this joyous destruction of regulations and norms that makes slapstick so pleasurable. However, he reminds that like all forms of Bakhtinian carnivalesque, also slapstick can be deeply ambivalent. A carnivalesque that creates a socially sanctioned space of spectacle in which values are freely violated may in fact, instead of being subversive, be an effective way

to single out any *actual* pressure for change: "A kind of comic catharsis prevents social tensions from accumulating to a dangerous level; a symbolic challenge to the ruling values helps to defuse a real one." (Shaviro 1993: 110)

According to Shaviro, the comedies of Jerry Lewis do not provide this kind of carnivalesque catharsis. Instead, it seems to be based on an exaggerated *respect* for social values and norms, rather than on a consciously rebellious defiance of them *à la* The Marx Brothers. Lewis's comic personas never possess the will to violate the social norms; rather, he is an unconscious anarchist whose quest is to become socially proper. However, in all of his films Lewis's eagerness to obey orders and to act according to the socially defined norms only end in failure and catastrophe. And, as a result of being fulfilled to excess, the social order collapses in a movement that is very different from that of carnivalesque transgression.<sup>15</sup> What is then disturbing in Jerry Lewis's films is that his characters cannot assert themselves as subjects in opposition to society, because it is through the hegemonic terms of social order that

4 Shaviro 1993: 108.

5 For a discussion see also Shaviro 1993 and Katz 1999.

6 Shaviro 1993: 108-9.

7 See also Shaviro 1993: 108-9.

8 Katz 1999: 91-2.

9 Koestler 1964.

10 Katz 1999: 105.

11 Katz 1999: 108-11.

12 Elster 1999: 143.

13 Elster 1999: 154.

14 Katz 1999: 147.

15 Shaviro 1993: 109-111.



they can conceive their subjectivity at all. As a result, the comic destruction of norms becomes the source of judgement not against the norm, but against the *self*.<sup>16</sup>

This description could be well applied to the comedy of Jim Carrey as well. The characters that he personifies are in fact often totally unaware of any moral code and they do not realize that their actions break every single social rule. Furthermore, the characters hardly ever experience shame or embarrassment themselves. But why does the spectator then feel embarrassment, awkwardness and even shame before his actions on the screen? It is not that s/he would directly identify with the characters or their emotions. Instead, the spectator identifies with the *situation* Carrey's characters find themselves in. The spectator imagines her/himself in the same kind of situations and feels a kind of sympathetic embarrassment on behalf of Carrey's character.

The fact that the spectator imagines her/himself in these shameful or embarrassing situations creates a demand for a response from the part of the spectator. But, of course, it is impossible to respond to what the situation demands in the case of embarrassment in the cinematic experience! Therefore the spectator has to find other ways to deal with her/his embarrassment. Usually the ways to deal with shame are denial, laughter and confession, and in the context of the (comedy) film the easiest way to deal with embarrassment is through laughter. According to Michael Lewis, laughter serves to distance one's self from the emotional experience of embarrassment. Because laughter is such a powerful stimulus, it allows us to focus on another emotion, and thereby enables us to defocus the shame or embarrassment. Like confession, it provides the opportunity for the transgressing person to join the others in viewing the self. In this way, the self metaphorically moves from the site of embarrassment to the site of the observer. By laughing, the spectator breaks the identification with the character that is doing something embarrassing, and joins the (imaginary) observers instead.<sup>17</sup>

Phenomenologically speaking, by laughter the spectator joins the others, and therefore rather than being (through identification) the object of others' laughter, s/he becomes the one who laughs at the behavior of the character on the screen. The 'self' of the spectator moves from the position of being shamed or embarrassed, the position in which s/he feels the amused looks of the others, to a position where s/he is with the others, amused. Through laughter, the identification with the observed has changed to the identification with the observers; the spiral of embarrassment is broken.<sup>18</sup> The paradox of embarrassment in cinematic experience is that you are sitting in the safe loneliness of an obscure film theatre, but just for the same reason you feel awkward and disturbed before the situation. Through identification you see yourself in the same situation as the character that is doing something obscene, and feel embarrassed. This embarrassment produces a virtual action tendency, the intense desire to see the character respond to the situation. But since this does not happen, and since you are in no position to intervene in the situation, there is nothing you can do but watch—and laugh.

In *The Cable Guy*, the reactions of Chip Douglas's friend

Steven (Matthew Broderick) reflect the spectator's reactions and illustrate what has been written above. Steven is shocked and ashamed time after time when Chip embarrasses him in front of other people. He does the most disgusting things like putting the chicken skin on his face in the restaurant imitating *The Silence of the Lambs*. He plays basketball as it were freestyle wrestling. The way he puts his soul into the role of knight in medieval-style restaurant is overflowing, and his karaoke act highlights all the aspects of his personality. In fact, he acts as if he did not have a superego. Steven sees how Chip looks like in the eyes of others (even when there are no other people around), which is something Chip himself is unable to see. And since Steven has already formed a relationship with Chip, he is capable of identifying with Chip, and thus he feels shame in behalf of Chip. He is capable of imagining himself being in the same kind of situation Chip finds himself in, and sees himself in this situation with the eyes of others. Furthermore, being Chip's (involuntary) friend he feels (quite rightly) that others associate him with Chip's behavior. Later Steven finds himself in a shameful situation, which turns into a nightmare just because he is capable of feeling shame, quite unlike Chip. As a revenge of turning down his friendship, Chip brings Steven's privacy into public and frames him from storing stolen property. Steven is very much aware of how he now looks like in front of other people, his friends, relatives, colleagues and his boss. He realizes that he has become socially unacceptable.

### Pleasurable embarrassment

In many Jim Carrey's films, both embarrassment and laughter are arisen as a consequence of identifying with the behavior that is not accepted in cultural norms and that is disapproved by others. But could this embarrassment therefore function as a productive emotion, through which the cultural values become visible? According to Mario Jacoby, in shame and embarrassment the conflict between the aspect of cultural adaptation and the aspect of personal integrity may lead to questioning a cultural code that one has adopted without reflection. In such a process of emancipation, things that were once shameful may come to elicit new responses.<sup>19</sup>

The enjoyment and pleasure in the films of Jim Carrey may thus lie in overcoming the embarrassment through the emancipation from the cultural codes. Very often these codes are related to the field of body and bodily functions. This can give us a slight idea how free our body could be when it is not fettered by culture. For instance in *Dumb & Dumber*, Lloyd Christmas does not seem to have problems in dealing with his bodily functions in front of other people; in fact, belching in public is the most insignificant of his bad habits. Furthermore, he reacts to everything directly with his body, without thinking, and is capable to move from laughter to tears in few seconds depending on his ever-changing moods. If he is threatened, he regresses to the level of the three-year-old child sucking his thumb, and if he gets money, he becomes a consuming monster. But of course even his consuming habits are in contradiction to the cultural conventions: for an exclusive gala dinner party he for instance purchases a ridiculous, orange Liberace-costume from the 1970s. To take another example, in



*The Cable Guy* Carrey's character Chip Douglas constantly breaks the line of personal intimacy between strangers. He gesticulates sexually in wrong places, like when installing the cable. He gets easily enthusiastic and theatrical, like in the karaoke scene. He is oral; he eats ravenously, smacks while eating, and plays with his food. His body is voluminous and overall irresponsible, which is emphasized in the film by the continuous use of slow motion. This uncontrollability gets sometimes more intense and turns dangerous, like in the basketball scene; or violent, like in the tournament scene.

Furthermore, in *The Cable Guy* on the moral level Jim Carrey/Chip Douglas breaks the cultural codes by having no respect for other people and their privacy. He puts his nose into Steven's businesses, acts at Steven's house as it were his home, and finally messes his life up. He has no guilt in using the services of prostitutes and talks about his venereal diseases as it were the most natural everyday subject: "I'm healthy as a horse. Not a drip." He frames Steven as a criminal, blackmails him and does not seem to understand the consequences of his actions. And in the verbal, intellectual level Chip Douglas's character is a true post-modern thinker. He quotes sometimes Jerry Springer, sometimes the film *Midnight Express*. He reacts to situations by identifying with the situation he has previously seen in television and then repeating those situations. His quotation sources seem to be unlimited, because he has spent

half of his life watching television. He is not limited only to verbal expressions, but he stakes on his whole existence, his body and soul. He becomes an *embodied* Derridian quotation.

But how can the spectator take pleasure from these shameful and embarrassing scenes, since shame is predominately a painful experience? The solution to this problem lies in the difference between shame and embarrassment. Shame is a painful emotion, and even though embarrassment can sometimes match shame in the intensity of pain (and that is why they are often easily confused with each other), it can also be a partially *pleasant* experience. According to Susan Miller, the definitional center of embarrassment is the sense of being thrown out of balance. Because of this disintegrated quality of embarrassment, it is an uncomfortable state, but it may be pleasurable like sexual tension can be. Embarrassment can be pleasurable uncomfortable for instance if a person is not profoundly threatened, or if s/he senses that the self-exposure may have a flattering or erotic outcome.<sup>20</sup>

The pleasures of embarrassment in cinematic experience can be various. For instance, the embarrassment that the spec-

16 Shaviro 1993: 113.

17 Lewis 1995: 130. However, the viewing situation is in the film theatre, other spectators may indeed form a concrete group of observers.

18 Lewis 1995: 131.

19 Jacoby 1994: 46.

20 Miller 1985: 39-42.

*The Truman show* (1998)





tator feels in the films of Jim Carrey is partly pleasurable. This pleasure might reflect the fantasy of being able to be free from cultural norms without having to feel embarrassment or shame. The embarrassing cinematic pleasures may reassemble the horror-pleasure in the context of horror films. According to Ed S. Tan, the emotional experience from a safe distance is an essential characteristic in cinema spectatorship, especially as far as the horror film is concerned. A terrifying situation is entertaining, because you can do no more than watch. Were you in a position to intervene, in order to protect yourself and others, you would feel responsible and could no longer enjoy the fictional events on the screen. The inability to take action creates a certain measure of distance without detracting from the intensity of the emotions experienced.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, in the same way as in the horror film the spectator simultaneously fears and longs to see more horrifying scenes, in comedy the spectator fears and hopes to see monstrous behavior. Furthermore, in the horror the film spectator is always aware that s/he is not her/himself the victim. This awareness is essential to the dramatic effect. Because the spectator can do nothing, and is thus freed from the responsibility, it is possible for her/him to enjoy experiencing the fear evoked by the terrifying events on the screen. Similarly, in an embarrassing film experience the pleasure might spring from the relief of not being the one who is doing the embarrassing act. Or, the pleasure might be masochistic pleasure in the context of pain.

According to Shaviro, for low-order slapstick comedy films à la Jerry Lewis, masochistic pleasure is characteristic, and they even tend to confirm Gaylyn Studlar's thesis on cinema operating along the lines of masochistic identification (rather than a sadistic and controlling one) in her essay "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema."<sup>22</sup> According to the 'traditional' psychoanalytic view, identification is supposed to contribute to the illusory wholeness and stability of the ego. Yet for instance Jerry Lewis's 'overidentification' with the dominant values disrupts this coherence and, instead of a normalizing fixation, take the form of a unstable, disintegrated, deceptive contagion.<sup>23</sup>

In the same way as Jerry Lewis, by masochistically making embarrassment and self-humiliation the basis of his comedy, Jim Carrey turns the entire process of bourgeois subject formation inside out. By giving up the imaginary fantasies of wholeness and accepting the shameful lack, Lewis and Carrey appropriate the power of a stable and normative ego.<sup>24</sup> The embarrassing pleasure that is being evoked in the films of Jim Carrey seduces the spectator to participate in this abandoning of the stability of the ego in a spectacle of abjection that stirs delightful fantasy.

However, it seems that now that Jim Carrey is becoming established as a 'serious comedian'—after playing in the films like *The Truman Show* and *Man on the Moon*, which both got a favorable reception from the critics—his films break less and less cultural taboos. Also the connection between embarrassment and laughter has become weaker in those two films. Even though the actions of his characters are still extreme, they are not in such a loud contradiction with their context. For

instance, in *The Truman Show* the character is not—at first—aware that he is being looked at. Therefore he is not to blame if he does not feel shame even though he did do something embarrassing in his own privacy. The extraordinary situation of *The Truman Show* becomes to function as a distancing element, and instead of shame on behalf of Truman; the spectator feels empathy and pity towards him. In *Man on the Moon* the distancing element is the fact that Carrey performs a performer, Andy Kaufman, and from a performer one may expect strange behavior. Because it is clear that Carrey/Kaufman's act is purely a performance, it becomes acceptable. One could still mention one of his earlier films as an example of 'distanced shame': in *The Mask* the behavior of The Mask/Stany Lee is beyond all the cultural codes, but as it is partly animated film, his behavior appears as it were in the appropriate 'Tex Avery' context.

The last example excluded, it seems that shame, extremity and cultural anarchy do not go hand in hand with genuine appreciation. In fact, one of Carrey's latest film, *Me, Myself and Irene* (Peter Farrelly, 2000) illustrates the situation Carrey is at the moment facing. In this film, Carrey plays a police agent with a split personality. When he is 'Charlie', he acts as if he were a victim of circumstances. His comic art is based on being humiliated and laughed at. However, when 'Hank' appears, he is in control; he is the one who creates the comic situations by breaking the rules and being unconventional in every way. In the end, however, the conventional 'Charlie', who in the end 'gets the girl', takes over. To me it seems that Jim Carrey's career is in the same kind of crossroads of two screen personalities. But it is still left unseen, which personality will finally conquer: the conventional or the anarchistic one?

21 Tan 1996: 76.

22 Shaviro 1993: 116.

23 Shaviro 1993:123.

24 Shaviro 1993: 123-4.

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by Gael Sweeney

# THE MAN IN THE PINK SHIRT

## HUGH GRANT AND THE DILEMMA OF BRITISH MASCULINITY

"The New Cary Grant?" First, a little Hugh-speak:

**CHARLES:** "Ehm, look. Sorry, sorry. I just, ehm, well, this is a very stupid question and—particularly in view of our recent shopping excursion—but I just wondered, by any chance, ehm, eh, I mean obviously not because I am just some git who's only slept with nine people, but-but I-I just wondered... ehh. I really feel, ehh, in short, to recap it slightly in a clearer version, eh, in the words of David Cassidy in fact, eh, while he was still with the Partridge Family, eh, 'I think I love you,' and, eh, I-I just wondered by any chance you wouldn't like to... Eh... Eh... No, no, no of course not... I'm an idiot, he's not... Excellent. Excellent. Fantastic. Eh, I was gonna say—Lovely to see you. Sorry to disturb—Better get on... Fuck."

**CARRIE:** "That was very romantic."

**CHARLES:** "Well, I thought it over a lot."<sup>1</sup>

With this patent lie, Hugh Grant made his mark as a romantic leading man in his 1994 hit film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. This film's surprising success was largely due to the personal charisma of Grant, a 34-year-old British actor who had spent years "as a fop-fringed pretty boy" (Nathan 98) in various costume dramas and who was almost completely unknown in the United States. The stumbling but endearing style of wooing, the non-sexual sexiness, the pale, untuned, androgynous British body of Hugh Grant made for an unusual film hero in an era dominated by hyper-American action stars and action films. In the next year Grant would win the Golden Globe for Best Actor in a Comedy, appear on the covers of countless magazines, become a favorite talk show raconteur—and find himself at the center of one of the biggest star scandals of the 1990s. Grant was hailed as the savior of "romanticism" in the movies and as the "New Cary Grant" for his British charm and humor, and for the effect he had on female viewers, an audience that had been largely neglected in the testosterone-driven 1980s of Reagan, Stallone, and Schwarzenegger.

Hugh Grant is "the sort of Englishman whom it has become fashionable in certain circles to knock as being out-dated, even irrelevant or embarrassing" (*The Daily Telegraph* of London quoted in Tresidder 199). Usually a minor player in that British specialty, the Heritage Film, with roles in *Maurice* (1987), *White Mischief* (1987), *The Lair of the White Worm* (1988), and *The Remains of the Day* (1993), Grant's forté was well-dressed and vacuous characters with names like Lord Adrian, Lord Durham, Lord James D'Ampton, Lord Byron, and even, in *The Lady and the Highwayman* (1989), Lord Lucius Vyne, "The Silver Blade"! Grant's early star persona is that of the good-looking, but naive "upper class twit." In *The Remains of the Day* viewers are supposed to believe that the twenty-something Hugh needs to be told the facts of life on the eve of his wedding by the butler. If the loss of British phallic power in post-war film culture equates with the loss of the British Empire, then the Heritage Film of the 1980s was meant to be an attempt to recoup some of that power through nostalgia and class, but the focus on costume and décor, as well as a heavy homo-

1. From the screenplay of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* by Richard Curtis—with Grant's "additions" as taken directly from the DVD version of the film.





*Mickey Blue Eyes (1999)*



erotic subtext in most of the films, served to undercut the so-called reclamation of British masculinity, at least in the eyes of American viewers. These British products ended up as award-winning, but were essentially marginalized in the American market. Because of this, until his 1994 breakthrough film, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, Grant was less than a footnote to the American movie-going public.

But as a film star in the 1990s, Hugh Grant's star image, like that of the Cary Grant, to whom he has been compared, is made up of numerous contradictions and confusions over American and British identity and class, issues of heterosexuality, and the status of the romantic male in popular film at the end of the Millennium. The declaration of love quoted above is made to an American woman with whom Charles has fallen in love at first sight, but who has "seduced and abandoned" him twice already, bragged that she has three times his sexual experience, and is now preparing to wed another older, wealthier man. In a Hugh Grant film it is not considered strange for his character to go with his beloved to try on wedding dresses for a marriage to someone else. In the context of Hugh Grant's star image—and the at once apologetic, humiliating, and romantic speech above—it makes perfect sense. The labeling of Hugh Grant as the "New Cary Grant" already suggests those contradictions of nationality, gender, and class that make Cary Grant himself such a problematic and interesting star. And if, as Christine Gledhill states, "Stardom proper arises when the off-stage or off-screen life of the actor becomes as important as the performed role in the production of a semi-autonomous persona or image, a development which depends on mass circulation journalism and photography" (Gledhill 213), then Hugh Grant, an object of desire on film and an object of speculation and surveillance in public, qualifies for that kind of stardom. The "Hugh Grant" star image was further complicated and problematized by his sudden "celebrity" through his arrest with a prostitute at the height of his new fame. These events as much as his screen performances have influenced the reading and the reception of his films.

Thomas DiPiero argues that "possessing a phallus (in the sense of social and cultural empowerment) and being male are not necessarily the same thing" (Gabbard 45). Instead, "phallic entitlement is just as dependent upon 'one's racial and class identity, along with one's sexual orientation, national identity, and a host of other qualities'" (DiPiero 103). Masculinity of any sort is not a monolithic construction, but "an unstable nexus of social and political phenomena, rather than as a mystified, consistent source of power and control" (DiPiero 118). If, as Judith Butler contends, gender identity is performance, then gender identity and national identity together make for a doubly constituted performance. The norm of masculinity in a film culture dominated by American product is an American masculinity; therefore, any other kind or form of masculinity must be constructed as Other and always be counterpoised to the dominant masculinity. The British male represents one of the most troublesome of Others for American masculinity: besides carrying an aura of class and erudition, he also stands outside of the macho stereotypes that both limit and focus mainstream American male stars. From his first film role in

1982 as a jaded Oxford aristocrat in *Privileged*, through the sexually confused objects of lust, both gay and straight, in *Maurice* and *Impromptu* (1991) to the bumbling romantic heroes of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Notting Hill* (1999), Grant has constructed a star image of sexual ambiguity welded with romantic allure quite unlike that of any other contemporary male star, but especially any American male star. As Richard Dyer asserts: "... star images function crucially in relation to contradictions within and between ideologies, which they seek variously to 'manage' or resolve. In exceptional cases... Certain stars, far from managing contradictions, either expose them or embody an alternative or oppositional ideological position (itself usually contradictory) to dominant ideology" (Dyer *Stars* 38). Like Cary Grant before him, Hugh Grant exposes the contradictions in the construction of the romantic lead, as well as offering an alternative, oppositional position to that of the macho American hero. The contradictions of Grant's image—the conflicted, yet flamboyant gay aura crossed with the charming, manic romantic heterosexual—produces a figure who embodies the problematic nature of the British masculinity in the 1990s.

Hugh Grant, at his most basic level, represents the Englishman as the British Body. As a British film star who did not make his reputation on the stage as a Master of Acting, in the way of an Olivier or Anthony Hopkins or Kenneth Branagh, but instead came up on film and in television as a virtual male starlet, Grant cannot claim the kind of "British Acting Credibility" that might temper his brand of problematic masculinity. Instead, Hugh offers his body and his beauty, including his charm and vulnerability, in place of a Royal Shakespeare resumé. The British body on film is usually offered in contrast to the buff, muscular, and laboring American body. Pale, slack, angular, hairless, narrow-chested, knob-kneed—the loss of bodily control equates with an iconic loss of mastery and Empire. The British body, when revealed, seems to signal the place of the Englishman as a quaint and disempowered anachronism in a world of vital Americans with glistening pecs. The sexual ambiguity of his body reflects the ambiguity of his place in a world where he no longer is in control, and is a containment of his manner and attitude—and his always suspect sexuality. Hugh, with his bone-white, hairless body and stork-legs, as well as his feminine facial delicacy, is a threat to norms of American masculinity, especially when he proves so appealing to women (especially American women). When Hugh stands before Andie MacDowell and declares his love on the riverbank in *Four Weddings*, the pathos and romanticism of the situation is underlined by the ridiculously baggy shorts he wears, revealing those hopeless legs. A favorite Grant anecdote, which appears in numerous interviews and articles, is the aborted nude scene: that one director had planned for an explicit showing of the Grant flesh—until Hugh arrived on the set and actually disrobed. The scene was immediately canceled.

The Englishman is also marked in culture as a master of language, and Hugh Grant is often declared as "witty," mainly for his quips on talk shows and award shows. But that "wit" is tempered in his films by situational aphasia. Hugh characters are regularly struck dumb or stuttering, unable to articulate the





*Notting Hill* (1999). Julia Roberts becomes Grant's love interest.

most basic emotion, as in the scene from *Four Weddings* quoted at the beginning. Language is often set out as the province of the British, regardless of class positioning: British performers as diverse as Lord Laurence Olivier and John Lennon are represented in their films as mastering situations by their superior control over language. But Grant's inarticulateness and his connection with loss of speech throw his body and his control (or lack of control) over it to the fore. In *Four Weddings*, even Charles' brother, a deaf mute, is still articulate, and is the one who translates Charles' desire into action by "interpreting" his real feelings (Charles' love for Carrie) and preventing his marriage to the wrong woman. In *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill But Came Down a Mountain* (1995), Anson, the Englishman of the title, cannot speak or understand Welsh and so remains in ignorance of the schemes and plans going on around him. This loss of oral control expands to problems with the mouth in general: Grant is constantly being kissed by the "wrong" person in his films, whether it is Clive rejecting the kisses of Maurice, Charles kissing another man's fiancée, or Samuel being kissed by Marty (Tom Arnold)—many times!—and punched in the mouth by "Arnie the Dinosaur" in *Nine Months*. And, of course, Hugh Grant's most infamous loss of mouth control with Divine Brown brought the contradictions of his star image and body—and sexuality—even more into play.

In another parallel with the star image of Cary Grant, Hugh Grant revives and revises the 1950s trope of the reluctant bachelor for the 1990s. Steven Cohan details the ways in which the figure of the bachelor in 1950s romantic comedies, especially those of Cary Grant, critiques heterosexuality. The bachelor "personified some of the most deeply felt anxieties about male sexuality... Interpreted with suspicion for his refusal to

embrace the whole package of privileges and responsibilities that marriage was supposed to offer... the bachelor cut a highly ambiguous figure" (Cohan 1997). Hugh's character's resistance to marriage can be interpreted as a resistance to heterosexual assumptions, especially when read in conjunction with a British identity and a screen persona already sexually suspect.

The Richard Curtis-written *Four Weddings and a Funeral* is typical of this resistance to marriage and heterosexual norms. *Four Weddings* is about the ritual nature of courtship and Charles' peripheral relationship to it. But even in this, his most directly romantic role, Grant's masculine image is constantly contradicted and problematized. Charles is always the "Best Man"—the man that all the women want but can never marry—but also the perennial Bridesmaid, seemingly never going anywhere but to the weddings of other people. A Hamlet of romance, Charles is indecisive and noncommittal, until, of course, he finds a woman he cannot have: "Why am I always at weddings and never actually getting married?" Stuttering, aphasic, stumbling, distracted, oversleeping, and saying the most inappropriate thing at the most inappropriate time are all symptoms of both Charles' marginalization and his heterosexual panic.

The role of Charles plays out all of Grant's patented mannerisms and ticks, but makes them endearing. He's the quintessential harmless man, practically a blushing virgin in the face of Andie MacDowell's tall, dark American predator. Carrie loves him and leaves, and loves and leaves again: "You ruthlessly slept with me twice and never rang me!" Charles whimpers like a betrayed schoolgirl. But as an American, Carrie is outside the expectations and mores of Charles' class and British understanding: she is Charles' Other and so lacks the British inhibitions that hinder him and his compatriots. Fiona



(Kristin Scott-Thomas), in love with Charles for many years but, typically, unable to show it, calls Carrie "a slut" and certainly Carrie is not shy about recounting the number of her lovers (33) in detail, while Charles is completely inarticulate in regards to his wants and needs, a boy-man whose romantic utterances are limited to stammering, beating his head against walls and fence-posts, and quoting lyrics from Partridge Family songs. "I'm only some git who's slept with nine people," he apologizes when confronted with Carrie's long list, punctuating his despair with schoolboy groans of "Fuckadoodle-doo!" The use of "people" rather than "women" suggests that potentiality, never far from the mind in any Grant performance, that some of those "people" were men, opening the possibility that Charles' aversion to marriage is not simply social or pathological, but sexual. Charles' Big Date with his desired Carrie consists of helping her pick out her dress for her wedding to another man, his declaration of love conducted in a ridiculous pair of baggy shorts that underline the boyishness and immaturity of his mind and his vulnerable British body. Charles' own history as an infamous "serial dater" is equally ineffectual, while the women closest to him are non-erotic: his roommate, Scarlett, is platonic and child-like, his best friend, Fiona, is in love with him, but as unable to show her emotions as Charles, while he doesn't love—or even like—his eventual fiancée, Henrietta. And the woman he does love is constantly elusive—and constantly marrying someone else. Characteristically, the most stable and loving couple in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* is the gay Gareth and Matthew; they also turn out to be, again characteristically, the most tragic. Charles' closeness to Matthew and Gareth also connects him with Grant's earlier gay characters like Maurice's Clive and James in *Our Sons*, as halves of romanticized and melancholy couples. In the end, Matthew is revealed as Charles' own best man, suggesting a prior relationship between them that, like all the other relationships in the film, is hinted at but never made explicit.

A second Richard Curtis romantic comedy, *Notting Hill* (1999), pairs Hugh Grant with the top female romantic star of the 1990s, Julia Roberts. The circumstances of Grant's 1995 arrest and his co-star's fame as the streetwalker in *Pretty Woman* resonate throughout this film like a huge echo. Roberts plays Anna Scott, a popular American movie star—not unlike Julia Roberts. But in this reverse Cinderella story, or as Curtis called it, "a concealed fairytale" (Curtis 13), Grant as William Thacker literally plays the "shop-girl" to Roberts' Hollywood princess. True to the formula of *Four Weddings*, Hugh Grant is once again a floppy-haired, dog-eyed, stammering mess who falls in love at first sight with an aggressive, cock-teasing American woman who barges into his life, takes it over, loves him, leaves him and, eventually, returns for the proverbial happy ending.

But Grant seems older and more vulnerable here. In *Four Weddings*, Grant's Charles was set up as a "serial dater," a cad-in-the-making whose main problem was too many women and not enough commitment to any of them. In *Notting Hill*, William is a sad and lonely man, divorced by his wife, the owner of a failing business (a shop that sells only travel books), bolstered, as is usual in a Curtis-written film, by an eccentric cast of friends and relatives. The level of humiliation and chas-

tisement that Grant's character undergoes in *Notting Hill* reaches a new high. William's masculinity is constantly challenged by Anna. William can't climb the fence into the garden and says "Whoopsidaiesies" as he repeatedly attempts and fails—something only "little girls with blonde ringlets" would say, Anna Scott points out, as she athletically vaults over the fence, calling, "Come on, Flops." When confronted by Anna's macho American boyfriend (Alec Baldwin), Anna forces him to pretend to be a waiter, clearing the dishes away from a hotel suite as Anna and her boyfriend make-out in front of him. William finds his face adorning the British tabloids after the Press discover Anna hiding in his house at Notting Hill—a brush with fame that infuriates Anna, but leaves William shaken and alone. But William's confusion and stumbling seem almost reasonable given the "star power" and massive celebrity of Anna Scott, which overpower the romantic elements of the film entirely. Playing on the star images of both Hugh Grant and Julia Roberts, *Notting Hill* is as much a riff on stardom and scandal in an international media culture as it is an intimate romance between two people from dissimilar worlds. Even at the moment of his "romantic triumph"—a moment that oddly neglects the requisite final embrace and kiss—William is labeled as "the man in the pink shirt"—a feminized and marginalized appendage to the only real "subject" that matters in a world that worships celebrity and scandal: Anna Scott.

In her book on images of women in romantic and domestic comedy, *The Unruly Woman*, Kathleen Rowe states that "The path to the male hero's happiness requires serious chastisement... (and) undergoes a kind of reverse disciplining that releases the femininity already latent within him. That disciplining, accomplished through moments of male humiliation, is often accompanied by the sound of the unruly woman's laughter" (145-6). In a similar mode, Andrew Britton points to what he calls the "comedy of male chastisement," those romantic comedies, mainly from the 1930s and 1940s, that are "full of scenes in which he [the male star] is subjected to the most extreme discomfiture, humiliation and loss of face by women" (38). The male star on which both Rowe and Britton focus as the object of all this female discipline and degradation is Cary Grant, but their conception could be tailored just as well to Grant's heir in humiliation, Hugh Grant. Hugh's films remake the expectations of the romantic comedy genre in the 1990s, just as Cary's did for his own era with the romantic screwball comedies. What other romantic leading men of either era are so beleaguered? Like Cary Grant, Hugh is instructed by, beset by, and overwhelmed by women, a trope that runs counter to the customary paradigm of men educating women, especially in film.<sup>2</sup>

If women control the direction, they also control sexuality in Hugh Grant films: they are the experienced ones, more mature and wise compared to forlorn and often solitary Hugh.<sup>3</sup> Grant's persona appeals to a female fantasy of control and domination of the masculine: women can and are expected to be the aggressors here.<sup>4</sup> Grant is not melodramatized, his tribulations are not sentimentalized, like those of Tom Hanks in

2. Especially in romantic comedies from *Pygmalion* (1938), to *Annie Hall* (1977), to *Pretty Woman* (1990), to *I.Q.* (1994).



*Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), or even *Turner and Hooch* (1989) or Richard Gere in *Pretty Woman* (1990). Grant's soulful looks and sensitive impulses are not as likely to be indulged as undercut by a pratfall, a mocking comment, or by Grant's own self-effacement. Samuel asking for forgiveness by his girlfriend's hospital bed in *Nine Months*,—a requisite "touching moment"—is immediately defused by her stern order to "lose the earring"—the mark both of his bachelor independence and his gender confusion.

Thomas DiPiero argues that "any display of masculinity is essentially hysterical" (Gabbard 45/DiPiero 118), and that masculinity "can only ever be hysterical" (DiPiero 118). Hugh Grant's brand of hysteria often seems to be the main marker of his masculinity. In all moments of sexual stress the typical Grant character breaks down physically and mentally in some way. Humiliation is the order of the day in a Hugh Grant film. In *Maurice* Clive has a complete collapse while visiting Maurice's home, giving Maurice an opportunity to nurse his lover, but also driving Clive, finally, to decide to reject his own sexual desires. *Impromptu* portrays Chopin, already tubercular, fainting at George Sand's mere approach. *Nine Months* (1995) finds Samuel attacked by a horde of small girls, their father (Tom Arnold), a mad Russian obstetrician (Robin Williams), and a large purple dinosaur named Arnie. His attempt at macho derring-do in *Extreme Measures* (1996) leaves Dr. Guy Luthan with his nose bloodied like a schoolboy, lectured by a condescending Gene Hackman and chased by a pair of body-snatchers named Burke and Hare. Sexual moments are inevitably interrupted rudely. In *Four Weddings*, Carrie "pretends" to be a stalker à la Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction* (1987). In *Nine Months*, Samuel and Rebecca's romantic picnic in Golden Gate Park is destroyed by the crass Dwyers, while later their sexual encounters are cut short by a horde of small children attacking their bed, a man-eating preying mantis, and, finally, the foetus' kick. Only final, redemptive moments—the "dance" with the baby in *Nine Months*, the hug in the rain in *Four Weddings*, the reunion with Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) or the celebration on the top of the mountain in *The Englishman* (1995)—when his masculinity has been remade and secured by the instruction of an authoritative woman—are allowed to be completed without a laugh or a moment of embarrassment.

Director Chris Columbus' films, such as *Home Alone* (1990), *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993), show adult males under constant siege by women, children, dogs, society, and even, seemingly, fate; they suffer humiliation, pain, attack, pain, total cartoon-like destruction, their sexual identities chopped up in a total "loss of mastery" (Rowe 152). Columbus' *Nine Months*, Hugh Grant's first starring role in an American film, overturns the "unmarried bliss" of *Four Weddings*, but there's also a new hardness to his character. Samuel betrays a selfishness and smugness that is new to the Grant persona, perhaps to prepare us for the way that Samuel will be completely broken down, like his poor red sports car, all in order to remake him for fatherhood—and for his American audience. The punishment that Grant undergoes in *Nine Months* also seems his penalty for the kind of masculinity that he represents. Humiliation, feminization (wearing

an earring, fainting, reading baby books, baby-sitting), physical attacks by children (the Dwyer girls, Samuel's child patients), animals and sci-fi creatures (the mantis and Arnie the Dinosaur, who specifically questions Samuel's heterosexual identity—"Here's one for the Queen," "Nancy boy," "your boyfriend"), friends and loved ones (Rebecca's leaving him, Marty's "French-kissing" fits), and the mad Russian obstetrician, Dr. Kosevich (Robin Williams), are all trials that Samuel must abide in order to "prove" his manhood and fitness for American fatherhood. In *Four Weddings*, a baby was the simple consequence of the final, albeit unmarried, love of Charles and Carrie; in *Nine Months* the baby is the be-all and end-all of Samuel's masculinity: a son not only confirms his manhood, but it seems to confirm his "Americanism," as well. Rebecca, Samuel's American girlfriend, is "naturally" a woman and so "naturally" a mother; fathers, however, must be created by society—and by women. If comedy breaks down the Law of the Father (Rowe 101), then it also upholds the mother: in *Nine Months* birth and regeneration (flowers blooming in front of the hospital, the vineyards, children) are celebrated, while mannish things (sports cars, careers, male bonding, and sex!) are mocked. Samuel, as an Englishman and an already feminized man, seems ripe for assimilation into fatherhood, especially in contrast to his friend, the macho pussy-hound Sean (Jeff Goldblum).

But the other alternative masculinity is that of Marty (Tom Arnold), whose own behavior is inseparable from that of a large, overbearing baby. The culminating birth scene becomes chaos because men interfere ("That's why women have the babies!"). And so the "real" love story in *Nine Months* is between man and foetus. Constance Penley and Tania Modleski have both called attention to the proliferation of recent films that celebrate "the Bachelor Machine"—the rewriting of the connection between Man and Birth that negates—or erases—the role of the Mother. *Nine Months* is such a love song between Father and Son. The ultrasound video of the baby is the means of opening Samuel's eyes to his responsibilities: he "sees" his son and is converted, especially when convinced that the baby has a penis and everything is right (no eyes in the middle of the forehead—characteristically, he can't say the word "penis" even though he's a "doctor"—actually a child psychologist). Samuel has the nightmares of monster babies with eyes in the center of their foreheads usually associated with mothers-to-be. Pregnant Rebecca is rendered as a praying/preying mantis, desiring only to mate and devour him after she finishes with him. Women are either castrating predators or earth-mother goddesses—often at the same time. Women both destroy and rebuild Boys like Hugh in order to remake them into Fathers: both *Four Weddings* and *Nine Months* end with babies in Grant's arms.

Hugh Grant confessed in an interview hyping *Nine Months* that Tom Arnold was his favorite kisser of all his co-stars (Ganahl)—a list that includes Andie MacDowell, Julianne Moore, Judy Davis, Emma Thompson—and Elizabeth Hurley. While the text of the film heterosexualizes Samuel, Grant's star persona and extra-textual behavior and remarks continue to undercut the film's message. With Hugh Grant as the star, *Nine*





*Months*, like *Four Weddings*, is about resistance to marriage and heterosexual panic as much as about babies and fatherhood. Grant's character, Samuel, has an open contempt for "Breeders"—a pejorative gay slang that I have rarely heard in a mainstream film and never from a heterosexual. Fear of "breeding" and "children" pervade the film, and families as seen through Samuel's eyes are frightening and lethal. We know nothing about Samuel's life or family outside the film (we know much more about a relatively minor character, Sean), except that he's a Brit living in San Francisco and his single state is one he is determined to hold on to. Again, he cannot make a decision about what he wants from his life. Samuel is a child psychologist who hates, or, more accurately, is afraid of children. His spoiled patients all hate their parents, leading Samuel to question, "Why should I have a child just so he can call me a bastard in ten years time?" Samuel is terrified of change and of the responsibilities that a child will bring. He clings to the symbols of his youth, chiefly his red sports car, which becomes as battered as Samuel's psyche, to be eventually replaced by a sturdy Ford Explorer with child-seats! As Gail Dwyer (Joan Cusack), the experienced wife and mother, points out to pregnant girlfriend Rebecca: "If you have a baby, that means that he has to grow up." It is interesting that the popular "psychology" of homosexuality posits it as an immature state of boys in arrested development, refusing to grow up—a construction similar to that of fifties bachelors, as Steven Cohan demonstrates: "His single status was assumed to signify a fundamental 'immaturity,' 'irresponsibility,' 'insecurity,' and 'latent homosexuality' that... needed correction" (Cohan 1997). Only women are true 'adults,' while men like Samuel,

and especially Sean and Marty, are just big and goofy children. In order to be redeemed, Samuel must confess his sins, which he does at Rebecca's bedside after a miscarriage scare. An identical scene, of course, would be played out for real when Hugh found himself having publicly to ask pardon: "Curious, though, the suffering one goes through in these circumstances—you don't mind it too much. I almost feel I deserve a good whipping" (Svetkey 28). Hugh Grant is never more sincere than when he is begging for forgiveness. The viewer takes pleasure in Grant's masochistic display: to see the humiliation of a handsome, intelligent male, marked with all the class and cultural privileges of a British identity, satisfies something in the viewer, especially the American viewer. But the apogee of Grant's star ritual of humiliation and forgiveness would be played out not in any of his films, but in the forum of public scandal and apology.

#### Scandal and Americanization

"Stardom," says Richard Dyer, "is an image of the way stars live" (Dyer 39). And much of stardom is involved in the "per-

3. Grant is almost completely lacking in family in most of his comedies. He has a brother in *Four Weddings* and a sister in *Notting Hill*, but they are rendered as distant and detached from him emotionally. In *Nine Months* he seems completely alone, especially when contrasted to the extended Dwyer family who take him under their wing. In both *Extreme Measures* and *Mickey Blue Eyes*, his isolation as a lone Englishman in New York underscores the separateness and difference of his identity and masculinity from the normal American model.

4. Even the prostitute, Divine Brown, was portrayed as the experienced, controlling figure: street-wise, a businesswoman, fantasy-fulfilling, and publicity-seeking. Hugh's stated fantasy figures include black women, Catholic schoolgirls, cheerleaders—more the fantasies of a teenaged boy than a movie star in his thirties!





*Nine Months* (1995). Julianne Moore and Grant.

sonal" lives and loves of stars. Gossip, scandal, speculation—all are as much a part of the total star image as what appears on the screen. Richard deCordova, in his book on the creation and maintenance of stardom, *Picture Personalities*, states:

It's not surprising that a system of discourse driven by a logic of secrecy (and revelation) would light upon the sexual as the ultimate secret... The star system... depends on an interpretive schema that equates identity with the private and furthermore accords the sexual the status of the most private, and thus the most truthful, locus of identity... Foucault shows how sexuality has been constituted primarily as a problem of truth in modern western society and notes the ways a 'will to knowledge' elicited concerning sexuality has led to incessant efforts to uncover its 'truth.' In the process sexuality has become a particularly privileged site of truth, in some contexts no doubt the ultimate truth. This is certainly the case in the star system.... truth is, at its limit, the truth of sexuality. The sexual scandal is the primal scene of all star discourse, the only scenario that offers the promise of a full and satisfying disclosure of the star's identity (deCordova 140-1).

With this in mind, July 1995 will certainly go down in the history of popular film phenomena as the month of "Hughmania": the time when Hugh Grant became the most talked about, written about, and gossiped about figure outside of the O.J. Simpson Trial (with which it shared the spotlight throughout the summer). Just off Sunset Boulevard, at 1:45 a.m. on June 27, 1995, Grant, after a long day of publicity interviews

for his first American starring role in *Nine Months*, was arrested for "suspicion of lewd conduct in a public place" in his rented white BMW convertible. Also arrested was prostitute Stella Marie Thompson, a.k.a. Divine Brown. Rather than tailing off after a few days, the story grew through the summer, until, like the Chaos Theory butterfly whose beating wings caused a hurricane halfway across the world, Grant's act seemed to expand in significance until, ultimately, it was credited with changing the fortunes not only of Hugh himself, his girlfriend, actress/Estée Lauder spokes-model Elizabeth Hurley, businesswoman/author/budding-celebrity and talk show guest Divine Brown—and two of the highest-paid stars on television, David Letterman and Jay Leno, as well as their respective networks, CBS and NBC.<sup>5</sup> The "Incident off Sunset," as it was known in the tabloid press, took on a life and legend of its own, shaping and forever transforming Grant's star image. The Divine Brown incident revealed not the "expected" secret—Grant's suspected secret queer identity—but a conventional (and unromantic) heterosexuality.<sup>6</sup> When Hugh Grant told Jay Leno's *Tonight Show* audience that "I've never been one to blow my own trumpet," while blissfully blushing, he both saved his career and confirmed his own star image.

Indeed, Grant's film persona of bumbler and innocent made his arrest read like a scene from one of his films and led to conjecture that it was all a publicity stunt. Grant's personal popularity with both women and men actually increased after his peccadillo. Television pundits have since credited Grant's hilariously apologetic (or grovelling, depending on your point of view) television interviews after his arrest, which read exactly like a scene from *Nine Months* or *Four Weddings*, with turning



the tide of the press in his favor.<sup>7</sup> Film critic Joel Siegel reported shortly after the film opened that "*Nine Months* cost more than all of Grant's previous films combined. But Hugh Grant's mea culpa seems to have been accepted. The studio is reporting amazing opening night grosses: two million dollars on a Wednesday night." *Nine Months* cost \$36 million and grossed \$69.7 million (a certified hit according to *Entertainment Weekly*).<sup>8</sup> A poll conducted at the online movie site "Mr. Showbiz" concluded that two out of five men were more likely to want to see *Nine Months* after they heard about the Grant scandal than before, as if his resort to a hooker and subsequent arrest solidified his masculine credentials.

Was the "Incident" read by male viewers as a fulfillment of a *Pretty Woman* fantasy? Why was Grant not perceived as another Joey Buttafuoco or Eddie Murphy, whose similar scandals were met with much public jeering? Yet Grant was almost universally forgiven, especially in the United States and especially by his female fans.<sup>9</sup> Grant's bumbling pick-up of Divine Brown may be forgivable because it matches his bumbling persona: his on-screen character and off-screen character converge in ways that make sense of his persona as a star. And if it was okay for Richard Gere in *Pretty Woman*, then why not for Hugh? But Divine Brown is a real woman and a real prostitute and not Julia Roberts; she is also a black woman. The marked contrast of the hapless and proper British Grant and the sassy, street-wise Brown makes the arrest read like a scene from a farce—in fact, an arrest scene originally included in *Nine Months* and featuring a mug shot of Grant's character, Samuel, looking almost identical to Grant's real mug shot, was hastily excised from the released film. The timing of the arrest and the subsequent publicity aroused much speculation around whether the incident was actually a publicity stunt to hype the movie during a very competitive summer season. The studio quickly deleted a mug shot scene from *Nine Months*, fearing it would remind audiences of Grant's un-romantic behavior off of *Sunset*. But the cut remained in the trailer, and, amazingly, was cheered at previews in New York and California right after the arrest. Hugh's persona of self-effacing bumbler also served him well in adversity: "Of the British tabloid newspapers who have crucified him in print, he said, 'I don't mind them being cruel about me, it seems sort of right to be suffering'" ("Disloyal"). The "disclosure" of Hugh's "secret" identity was his virtual outing as a heterosexual, something that homophobic American audiences could only cheer.

The Divine Brown scandal did not "ruin" Grant's career because his screen image was already one of sexual humiliation and contrition: his arrest and aftermath reaffirmed his screen image and his off-screen personality as "one." The Divine Brown scandal seemed to help a process of heterosexualization and Americanization of his entire star persona that was already in progress in his films. *Nine Months* (1995), *Extreme Measures* (1996), and *Mickey Blue Eyes* (1999), his three "American" films, attempt to transform his star image by normalizing him for a dominant masculinity, but with only varying degrees of success. Hugh Grant's second American feature is a "medical thriller" which purports to present a repositioned Grant as an intellectual, postmodern action hero. That this movement in

image was specifically calculated is shown by the control that Grant and girlfriend Elizabeth Hurley, as the producer, had over the production of the film. Grant turned down a number of roles<sup>10</sup> in order to play Dr. Guy Luthan, the Genevieve Bujold part in what is essentially a remake of *Coma* (1978). The plot of *Extreme Measures* also plays on media comparisons of Hugh with Cary Grant in its Hitchcockian trope of innocent man caught up in events that send his life out of his control. The British man is always already marked as Other and already always under suspicion.

In *Extreme Measures* everything is "underground": mole people live a life out of sight, honored doctors are really cold-blooded killers, and Guy is "outed" as a drug user, losing his job through rumor and witchhunting. The discourse of the closet, of deadly secrets and hidden lives, is rife in *Extreme Measures*, a film that is supposed to "normalize" Grant's persona. Even in publicity for the film, Hurley and Grant constantly undercut the image that *Extreme Measures* attempts to valorize—that of Hugh Grant as action man—by mocking the placement of Hugh on a motorcycle, with a gun in his hand, fist-fighting, and in other macho poses, in fact his entire new "butch" persona, and by treating the premise of their movie as a huge inside joke. Interviews for the opening focused more on Grant's discomfort in his new role and his continued apologizing for past peccadillos than on the film at hand. Said Grant in *Harper's Bazaar*:

"There's a lot of sweating and panting. Yeah, it's quite butch... I hold a gun, but I don't fire it. Elizabeth kept saying, 'It's

5. See Bill Carter's book *The Late Shift*, for background on the Letterman-Leno late night television wars.

6. Amy Fisher's lover Joey Buttafuoco had been arrested in similar circumstances, in the same area not long before Grant's arrest, and Eddie Murphy would also be implicated in an incident with a transsexual prostitute in May 1997. Articles on the Murphy affair in both the *New York Post* and the *New York Daily News*, both popular news tabloids, featured small photos of Hugh Grant and mentions of his arrest alongside pictures of Murphy.

7. As well as turning around Leno's *Tonight Show* fortunes, Grant's rating rattling appearance marked the first time Leno's version of *The Tonight Show* had beaten *The Late Show with David Letterman* in the rabid late night ratings war. Since then, Leno has consistently won the night—and Grant's show has come in for praise and blame from both sides. Television Critic Brian Lowry:

"The big moment for NBC came the week of July 10-14, when, after nearly two years of frustration, *The Tonight Show* topped Letterman in Nielsen household numbers for the first time when both shows were airing original episodes.

Granted, the NBC late-nighter received a major boost from having the first interview with an amusingly apologetic Hugh Grant, but *Tonight* subsequently tied Letterman two weeks later and beat him again outright during the Aug. 7-11 week.

Eager to trumpet that accomplishment, NBC paid for expedited national Nielsens to get the word out a few days before the late-night numbers are usually available."

8. The video is a hit as well: after its release in mid-January 1996, *Nine Months* was in the top five rentals for a number of weeks.

9. Critics in Britain have not proven to be quite as kind as in America where, perhaps, Grant seems a more exotic flower. The British press, tabloid and otherwise, were vicious in their coverage of Grant's peccadillo, as well as scathing in their reviews of *Nine Months*. They had also been much more skeptical of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and its success abroad, especially since it opened in England only months after it had already been a hit in the States, Germany, and many other countries. This strategy infuriated the xenophobic British media, which saw *Four Weddings* as another falsified, twit-ish portrayal of Britain for the tourist market.

10. The rejected roles included that of Paul McCartney in the projected Alison Anders film, *Paul Is Dead*, the lead in *Enigma*, and a number of romantic comedies, including something called *The Reluctant Groom*.





absurd if Hugh has a gun in his hand—everyone will guffaw.’ But I play it as though I’m someone who’s never held a gun before, so I might get away with it” (MacSweeney 416).

Grant’s image also took a beating in comparisons with the take-charge Hurley, his image of male abjection bolstered by being referred to as “languid and droll... Where Hurley is all warmth and polish, Grant appears a frailer creature” (MacSweeney 416). The same deprecating demeanor that had served Hugh Grant well in his moment of humiliation was not the stuff to sell a big-budgeted Hollywood thriller.

In fact, *Extreme Measures* offers Hugh Grant exactly the kind of role at which he excelled before he became the famous “floppy-haired bumbler” of 1990s romance. Dr. Guy Luthan is witty and intelligent, but without the dithering mannerisms that infected *Four Weddings* and *Sense and Sensibility*; the “action” sequences are realistic and not beyond the pale of Grant’s physical abilities. Director Michael Apted does not try to turn him into “Action Man,” but instead uses his everyman qualities and charm to recreate the notion of the action thriller in the true mode of Hitchcock and Cary Grant: talk is as important as action and the climax of the film features not a series of chases or explosions, but a discussion of medical ethics between Luthan and the villain, a brilliant doctor played by Gene Hackman. *Extreme Measures* garnered Grant his best reviews since *Four Weddings* and *A Funeral*, with many expressing surprise at his dramatic ability, forgetting his award winning performance for *Maurice*, as well as his turns in *The Remains of the Day* and other Heritage classics where he held

his own with actors such as Anthony Hopkins. However, other reviewers—and most filmgoers, it seems—couldn’t get beyond Hugh’s floppy-haired, bumbling image: “Grant stutters the ‘f’ word in an effort to seem tougher than the Oxbridge teddy bear and henpecked superstar that he is” (Adams). But *Extreme Measures*, the film that was to solidify Grant’s position as an American movie star, was a box office disappointment: after four weeks in release it had brought in no more than \$18 million.<sup>11</sup> It wasn’t until both *Notting Hill* and *Mickey Blue Eyes* were released in the summer of 1999 that Hugh Grant regained his star momentum in America.

*Mickey Blue Eyes* (1999)<sup>12</sup> continues the conflict between the Englishman and the American woman by setting Hugh Grant into another troublesome—and improbable—situation. This time Grant plays Michael Felgate, a British auctioneer with a posh New York auction house, who is engaged to the daughter of Frank, a minor mobster, played by James Caan. Grant displays his usual bumbling mannerisms and physical difficulties: in a scene that parallels the “Whoopsidaisies” bit in *Notting Hill*, Gina accuses Michael of doing a “funny run”—which, of course, is Grant’s usual “funny run.” But the difference in this romantic comedy is that the “odd couple” romance between Michael and Gina (Jeanne Tripplehorn<sup>13</sup>) is downplayed in favor of the developing relationship between Michael and Frank. Frank takes it upon himself to “normalize” Michael—and compared to the “normality” of the Mafia, Michael’s Britishness is strange and problematic, as well as exceedingly unmasculine according to the codes of America and the Mob (which, in the universe of contemporary film, amounts to the



same thing). The highlight of the film involves James Caan, basically playing his "Sonny" character from *The Godfather* (1972) thirty years on, trying to teach Grant the speech and mannerisms of a Little Italy wise guy. Michael has to be taught "correct" behavior, not just as a mafioso, but as an American man, attempting to take on the persona of Little Mickey Blue Eyes from St. Louis. As in most Hugh Grant films, there are specific moments of gender confusion, when the American's "assumption" of the innate queerness of the British male is outed. In *Mickey* this moment takes place at the wedding of Michael and Gina, the supposed culmination of Michael's acceptance into his new world. But not only is Michael "wired" by the FBI, marking his betrayal of The Family, but in a slapstick sequence he and his very upper-class British boss (James Fox) are discovered together with their pants down in the lavatory. "Fuckin' Limeys," says one of the hitmen, shaking his head sadly. The failure of Grant's character to assimilate into The Family further marks off the inability—and the unwillingness—of British masculinity to merge with mainstream, and therefore American, masculinity.

The marketability of Hugh Grant's star image can be seen not only in the success of films like *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Notting Hill*, but also in the proliferation of Grant-like heroes in the 1990s, transforming Hollywood's conception of the 1990s romantic lead. Ben Chaplin in *The Truth About Cats and Dogs* (1996), Richard E. Grant in *Jack & Sarah* (1995), Martin Donovan in *Portrait of a Lady* (1999) and perhaps even the "new" romanticism seen in films with usually harder-edged American stars, such as Tom Cruise's *Jerry McGuire* (1996) or Jack Nicholson's *As Good As It Gets* (1998),<sup>14</sup> borrow much from the self-deprecating Hugh Grant brand of leading manhood. Reviews of *Jack & Sarah* never failed to evoke Hugh Grant's name when critiquing Richard E. Grant, with most wishing that the former had actually played the role, while Ben Chaplin was hailed as a "Generation-X Hugh": "In Hollywood, there is a suspicion that Mr. Chaplin may be the next Englishman to begin popping up in American films, a new Hugh Grant. Mr. Chaplin vigorously disputes that notion. 'People are only saying that because I have an English accent and play in romantic comedies... I've worked with Hugh and he's a lot more clever, more eloquent, more educated than I. Actually, I don't think anyone can be 'the new Hugh Grant'" (Dreifus). Chaplin's disavowal merely underlines the actual similarity, down to the floppy hair and sweet sexual cluelessness of his *Cats and Dogs* character. Even such a sober project as *The English Patient* (1996) seems to take a lesson from Hugh Grant, from the revitalization of a British romantic subject to the presence of favorite Grant co-star Kristin Scott-Thomas.<sup>15</sup> Fiennes' star image is humorless and dour, but the passionate suffering and humiliation that he endures, transformed in *The English Patient* into romantic tragedy, owes much to the endearing humiliations of that other ever-troubled Brit. In a 1997 world-wide film poll that was reprinted in a number of the weekly tabloids, including the *Star*, Hugh Grant was securely ranked "Fourth Sexiest Man," after Mel Gibson, Sylvester Stallone, and Clint Eastwood, all of the school of macho that Grant's presence so firmly disavows.

It is certain that neither Hugh Grant, nor any other film star of recent times, can really ever be the "new Cary Grant" because the conditions that produced Cary Grant, that of the static British class system and the vibrant Hollywood of the mid-20th Century are so different from those at the beginning of the Third Millennium. But the example of Cary Grant's star image and his seemingly effortless integration of American and British concepts of masculinity to construct a persona that implies both but precludes neither, to create an ultimate "Movie Star", is an act that would be hard to follow in any era. How Hugh Grant and the British stars that come after him are to be produced and understood by a film industry that is increasingly global, but also increasingly "Americanized", remains to be seen. But perhaps the example and continued popularity of a Hugh Grant—and the memory of a Cary Grant—might make room for the kind of British masculinity that will not simply be marginalized, but will complement and even influence the American norm.

11. By comparison, in its first four weeks *The First Wives' Club* grossed \$72 million, while the poorly received *The Ghost and the Darkness* made over \$20 million in its first two weeks of release.
12. *Mickey Blue Eyes* was the second film (after *Extreme Measures*) from the Grant-Hurley production company, Simian Films.
13. In a role that cries out for an actress with real "Italian" credibility, like Laura San Giacomo or Annabella Sciorra. Besides having little chemistry with Grant, Tripplehorn doesn't even seem very "New York"—especially in scenes with Caan and a host of character veterans of a slew of Coppola and Scorsese films.
14. *As Good As It Gets* seems to split the Hugh Grant "persona" between two characters, Nicholson's Melvin, who has all the physical ticks and quirks, as well as the actual romance, and Greg Kinnear's gay Simon, who has sympathy, wit, and vulnerability.
15. It is interesting that Scott-Thomas was cast opposite Robert Redford in the film version of that ode to romance and castration, *The Horse Whisperer*, a book without the literary merit of *The English Patient*, but with plenty of the same kind of humorless sweep and suffering.

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# JOAN FONTAINE'S HEIRESS

## STAR IN TRANSITION

by Robert K. Lightning

The following is taken from an essay on Lang's *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (tentatively titled "Vindication of an Heiress") which examines the film in terms of (among other things) its use of Brechtian narrative strategies as well as the film's feminist politics. The section below titled "The heiress" deals primarily with the crucial intersection of star persona and type but to place it within the proper context of the film's pro-feminist thematic I have included portions of the surrounding sections. (For those unfamiliar with the film, the plot involves a writer, Tom Garrett/Dana Andrews who, in an attempt to expose the potential for error in trying a capital punishment case, plots to have himself tried and convicted for murder, apparently falsely. He is engaged to Susan Spencer/Joan Fontaine, daughter of a wealthy publisher (and co-conspirator) Austin Spencer/Sidney Blackmer).

Tom is the focal point for Lang's critique of masculinity but he is just one in a network of representative males. From the club owner (Dan Seymour) who initiated Patty into stripping to Mike Robinson, who would "rough her up just to keep in practice", the men are variously exploitive, opportunistic, and oppressive. One of the most ambiguous is Susan's father, whom the viewer comes to suspect of subterfuge, perhaps of setting Tom up to be executed. With Austin Spencer/Sidney Blackmer oppressive masculinity is taken into the realm of the bourgeois home and the incestuous possessiveness of the patriarch for his daughter. The grounds for rivalrous relations between Tom and Spencer are implied at the very moment of Susan's introduction where she bestows kisses in turn upon her father's head and then Tom's lips, implying a turning of affection from the father to his replacement. Tom's feelings for Susan being truly ambivalent (evidencing both desire and revulsion), mutual antagonism between the two men can be inferred as mutual desire to possess Susan. In fact Tom and Spencer are further linked from the moment they agree to the plot, the instigation of which remains ambiguously attributable to both (a point underlined by Susan's late query, "But whose idea was it?"): Spencer, designer of the plot, reveals its details in response to Tom's preoccupation ("Become engaged to my daughter and all you can talk about is capital punishment") and Tom promptly provides the necessary body. Mutual antagonism is further suggested by two tantalizing bits of evidence: Knowing from the police report that the killer smoked a pipe Spencer (without Tom's apparent knowledge) leaves tell-tale evidence of pipe smoking (the stained matchbook covers) in Tom's garage; on the night of the murder, Tom, a non-pipesmoker, is seen smoking a pipe (as recalled by

one of the strippers) in an apparent attempt to implicate (or emulate?) the pipe-smoking Spencer. As with Tom, the concrete results of the plot (the dissolution of the engagement) suggest Spencer's underlying motivation. (Although the discovery of the letter clearing Tom largely absolves Spencer of trying to destroy Tom, Lang makes clear that the letter is unusually inaccessible and Spencer's lawyer must get a court order to retrieve it).

The suggestions of masculine calculation and covert behavior that run throughout the film are in stark contrast to its opening moments which describe a state execution as an apparently impersonal judicial process carried out dutifully by impartial male functionaries, their implacably stern faces (with Spencer the one exception) testifying to their disinterest. This scene is easily read as symbolic of the world of masculine power that is potentially Tom's, whose current fame derives from having written one well-received book. It is a world characterized as so repressive that even the condemned man can barely muster a response to his own impending death (a lack of emotion that Tom will mirror at the conclusion). However, as in his interpersonal relations so in his institutional role is the patriarch governed by covert desires. Personal disinterest (the guarantee of the patriarch's fairness in the various professional roles that are nonetheless personally empowering to him) is challenged within the film's first few minutes when Spencer accuses the district attorney of pursuing capital cases because he aspires to the governorship, and nothing in Governor Thompson's subsequent behavior contradicts this interpretation. Similarly the reform-minded Spencer describes the latest execution in terms of personal competition between him and Thompson ("Score another one for Thompson"). By contrast, Susan, refusing to make a pretense of disinterest even when she temporarily runs the newspaper, instead insists upon using the paper to the fullest to free Tom. In the process she magnificently destabilizes institutionalized masculine power, her actions proving an affront not only to Thompson but to her veteran male staffers.

### The heiress

Both Susan and her father are (so to speak) keepers of the metaphorical flame of economic power, a point underscored when, in the cocktail bar, first Spencer and subsequently Susan provide lights for Tom who, appropriately, never has a light. Susan's economic power, of course, derives from her inheritance of the father's. The heiress is a figure of recurring cultural interest, her fascination lying in her possession of the prac-



tical means (even when she lacks the personal initiative) to confound her secondary patriarchal social status as a woman. She is often the focus of unscrupulous designs to relieve her of her inheritance (Henry James is the obvious literary touchstone here) as well as exclusively masculine designs to rectify the perversion of Woman's "natural" destiny for which the heiress's possession of money allows. This is a theme that is carried over into Hollywood's Freudian-feminist dramas of the forties and the casting of Joan Fontaine as Susan underlines the intertextual connection, the specific referent being Hitchcock's *Suspicion*. The Lang film in fact inverts Hitchcock's plot: Where in Hitchcock Fontaine's Lina McLaidlaw marries a man whom she comes to suspect is a murderer (until a last minute disclosure reveals his innocence), in the Lang she is engaged to a man she believes innocent of murder (until a last minute disclosure reveals his guilt). In both cases Fontaine's heterosexual commitment results in hysteria and emotional collapse, both symptomatic of an irresolvable internal conflict.

The heroines of such melodramas as *Suspicion* and Cukor's *Gaslight* exemplify the heiress as ingenuous victim of her heterosexual commitment. What, however, of the heiress who, while submitting to the overwhelming social demand to commit to male-dominated heterosexuality, also recognizes and accepts her advantageous economic position and asserts her power in the one option grudgingly guaranteed her, personal choice? In a society explicitly committed to democratic principles this is, at least in theory, acceptable. If, however, she additionally usurps the familiar privilege of the male to flex his economic might in all matters, including romance, and exploits her wealth in aggressive pursuit of her beloved, then all the cultural anxiety generated by the alignment of women and wealth quickly arises and the cultural conundrum that the

heiress represents is suddenly settled and she becomes (in the wrong hands) the rich bitch. One should note that even when her clout is not presented in terms of upsetting the stability of male power in the culture's dominant sexual arrangement, as a woman the heiress often acts as a magnet for any cultural ambivalence that attaches to the inheritance of wealth and its attendant class privilege in a democratic society and she can find herself the object of criticism that is, at best, invalid and at worst mean-spirited (these respective tendencies are best exemplified by the text's ambivalence toward the Hepburn heiress in *Stage Door* and its outright hostility toward her in *The Philadelphia Story*).

The patriarchal fear of women and wealth is such that the division between assertiveness and manipulation is essentially non-existent (just as the rhyming of "rich" and "bitch" suggests that, where women are concerned, the former inevitably produces the latter). In the hands of a particularly sensitive artist, however, the heiress retains her victim status as a woman even when she is clearly manipulative. In Minnelli's *An American in Paris*, the heiress Milo Robinson/Nina Foch clearly maneuvers the hero (Gene Kelly) in very undemocratic ways. But in the film's memorable limo ride back from a Montparnasse cafe, Foch and Minnelli splendidly reveal the desperation of the woman who, though economically independent, is subject to the same ideological pressures as her less financially secure sisters. As Foch here upstages Kelly dramatically so too does Milo forever problematize our relationship to the male protagonist.

Foch's dramatic shift from poise to vulnerability captures beautifully the heiress's duality, a duality which will also come to characterize Susan, as the contrasting images of the poised woman in the cocktail bar at the film's start and the woman who collapses ("I can't, I can't!") at the conclusion make appar-

*Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (1956) Susan (Joan Fontaine) and Tom (Dana Andrews)





ent. The casting of Fontaine has an added relevance, specifically in relation to the heiress as potential bitch. The partial inversion of the components comprising the Fontaine persona of the 1940s (social and/or sexual naiveté, acute emotional and physical trepidation and vulnerability, a submissiveness to masculine dominance that Molly Haskell famously described as masochistic) into the poised, fashionable and often brittle sophisticate of some of her post-forties work testifies amply to the extreme disquiet Fontaine's earlier rendering of female victimhood had induced. In *Katharine Hepburn: The Thirties and After* (Tyneside Cinema, 1984, p.96, reprinted as *Katharine Hepburn: Star as Feminist*) the late Andrew Britton notes "the various phases of a star's career are implicit in the others" and any given phase "will be accompanied by the shadow...of its counterparts". Thus the inversion of the largely superficial elements of the Fontaine persona is anticipated by the transformation her characters undergo from ingenuous youthfulness to knowing womanhood in her work for Hitchcock and Ophuls (Fontaine's recurring narrative maturation is familiar enough by 1945 that in the little-known *The Affairs of Susan* it can be subjected to partial parody).

Star careers also evidence a remarkable consistency which derives from the fact that (as Britton further notes) "each phase can be viewed as a specific attempt to solve the problems produced by the ideological material organized in the persona". From *Rebecca* to *Tender Is the Night* Fontaine is regularly cast as the patriarch's daughter, her oeuvre largely concerned with the problematic of a daughter's more or less affectionate identification with her father. Fontaine's early work for Hitchcock and Ophuls is primarily concerned with the critical bearing this relationship has on the development of the daughter's sexual/romantic fantasies, fantasies which the culture everywhere encourages but the text presents as detrimental to her. The texts define male-dominated heterosexual relations as confining, oppressive, and unfulfilling for women and the daughter's eventual entrapment in the culture's primary sexual arrangement (or, in Ophuls' *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, its imagined realization) is a direct result of her internalization of the culture's gender norms as romantic fantasy, a process instigated by a primary patriarchal agent, her own father.

*Beyond* is part of a trilogy of Fontaine films (which also includes Anthony Mann's *Serenade* and Robert Rossen's *Island in the Sun*) which is less concerned with Woman's inheritance of the culture's gender norms than their potential subversion as a result of Fontaine's social hegemony (deriving from family, income, race, etc.) over her lover. However the crucial narrative difference between the early work and these later films lies in the father's social position. In *Rebecca* and Ophuls' *Letter* the father's social insignificance (an unsuccessful artist in the former, a minor municipal bureaucrat in the latter) facilitates the daughter's seduction by the patriarch, his apparent impotence blinding the daughter to the real terms of his affection. In the Mann and Lang films (and *Suspicion*) Fontaine is the heiress and it is her identification, both personal and public, with a socially prominent father that problematises her heterosexual commitments. (In the Rossen, although there is no father, Fontaine is nonetheless heir to both class and race priv-

ilege and she essentially attempts to sacrifice her social prominence for her lover).

Both Fontaine and her respective collaborators are to be credited for preserving viewer empathy for the heiress, glacially self-possessed as the Fontaine heiress may be. In *Serenade*, for example, the heiress's manipulations of her lover clearly merit her the label "bitch". Yet even here an old family friend remembers watching her as a child "at the beach in front of her father's summer place at Newport, building beautiful castles in the sand—just for the exquisite pleasure of knocking them down". Thus, no less than in Fontaine's earlier work, the daughter's symbolic destruction of the home suggests that her adult distress derives from childhood experiences within that environment.

The adult heiress may also discover that additional means have been deployed to circumvent her agency. Like many a patriarch before him, Austin Spencer, through his will, has instituted the means whereby the heir's authority over the father's legacy will be inhibited even after his death: Susan will own the newspaper but it will be run by committee. With the greatest of ironies, the liberal-minded capitalist has hindered his daughter's access to power by forestalling the institution of democratic principles within the family business until after his own reign. Thus, whether the daughter opts to challenge the operations of capitalism at their institutional base or allow operations to continue status quo, she finds the decision has been efficiently taken out of her hands. The female heir finds herself in the paradoxical position of having access to a lot of money but nothing much to do with it that society validates. If she then drifts into the traditional female role it is not necessarily solely of her own volition. Under these conditions, Susan's analytical approach to compulsory heterosexuality acquires an aspect of radicalism, unique among Fontaine's daughters in being neither romantic nor malicious (as in *Serenade*). Exercising her right of selection to the fullest, Susan's choice of future husband is based both upon personal taste (she has already rejected the DA's assistant, a perfectly obliging nice guy) and exemplary logic: discovering Tom's involvement with Dolly Moore, Susan breaks with him not because he has betrayed the ethos of romance but because he has lied to her. Susan seems perfectly aware not only of the potential losses for women entailed in marriage but the threat posed to the heiress by opportunistic suitors and, consequently, truth is of considerably greater value to her than fidelity. With an austerity typical of the Fontaine sophisticate, Susan dismisses Tom's philandering as an exercise of the male ego and, while giving him ample opportunity to explain, ends the relationship.

One is not surprised that Susan's anti-Romance philosophy has been misinterpreted by critics. An oversimplified reading of the performance can be cited as partially causal: "Joan Fontaine...is icy and chilly" noted *The New York Tribune* at the time of the film's release. Twenty years after the film's release Gene Phillips made this assessment: "In *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* for example, a woman [Joan Fontaine] finds out that her lover once killed his mistress, but she doesn't turn him in until she falls in love with someone else." ("Fritz Lang Gives His Last Interview", *The Village Voice*, Aug. 16, 1976). Certainly faulty



critical faculties can be blamed for this reading which misinterprets Lang, in both letter and spirit, to a remarkable degree. I would propose, however, that the particulars of Mr. Phillips's construction betray again the culture's ambivalence toward (while not explicitly referring to) the heiress, for whom no degree of imagined anti-democratic behavior or Machiavellian calculation seems too extreme.

### The downfall of an heiress

Susan does eventually commit to Tom in the conventional sense. Strindberg's *Miss Julie* provides the prototypical example of the heiress who discovers, too late, the limited efficacy of her economic privilege as counterbalance to the ruthless terms of male-dominated heterosexuality, an opportunistic male, and her own indoctrination by the father's law. If seventy years after Strindberg's account of the tragic heiress class divisions as well as female chastity are of less consequence to the heiress, ideological constraints do continue to bear heavily upon her. The process whereby Susan's analytical powers are redirected from Tom's person to the efforts to save him is also that of her gradual ideological conversion as a woman "in love". Tom's trial is the catalyst for her transformation, providing as much an opportunity to try Susan as Woman as Tom for murder. Two instances during the trial are particularly suggestive: in the first Susan testifies that she can't recall when she last saw the gift lighter (she clearly does recall and is lying on Tom's behalf); in the second, she lowers her eyes slightly in apparent shame when Tom, on the witness stand, recalls their broken engagement. The implication of these two moments is that Susan's ideological conversion takes place under the auspices of "love" and guilt: Susan lies because the codes of appropriate womanly behavior (to which, despite her emotional detachment, her heterosexual attachment had partially committed her) with their specific emphasis on devotion and faith even in the face of reasonable doubt, dictate this is what a woman does for someone to whom she had formerly committed in the name of love. Similarly, Susan experiences shame because the broken engagement apparently provides the evidence of blackmail (because of Tom's withdrawal and sudden redepositing of a large sum of money, which he falsely testifies was for the purchase of an engagement ring) that may convict Tom. The successful culmination of Susan's ideological indoctrination is signaled some time later in the film when she states "When you love someone you must believe in him", a conventional declaration of devotion that just happens to make explicit the ideological basis of being "in love".

Although the sentiment expressed here seems completely at odds with the Susan of the film's first half, Lang begins suggesting Susan's capitulation to a self-abnegating femininity even before the trial (countered initially by her clinical approach to love). The gift lighter for instance has a dual symbolic function: if it represents Susan's sexual assertiveness, by giving it to Tom as an engagement present Susan symbolically relinquishes future control of marriage's sexual component to Tom. Later in the film, Susan appears in the stereotypical costume of the odalisque (bared shoulders, sheer, billowing scarf, bejewelled hair) with the express purpose of enticing Tom ("I

want to show you what you've been missing"). In fact one item of apparel—the veil—is used throughout to indicate Susan's capitulation to conventional gender behavior. Her donning of the veil corresponds in each instance to an action that indicates her commitment to compulsory heterosexuality (before and, incongruously, immediately after their implied lovemaking; her appearance on the witness stand) or a crisis generated by that commitment (the dénouement and her subsequent breakdown).

It is finally a conflict between her commitment to an ideology of womanliness and her objective social obligations that precipitates the internal crisis that results in Susan's breakdown. The presence of her former lover Bob Hale/Arthur Franz after the revelation of Tom's guilt is vital both to our understanding of the internal conflict's gender basis and to project the possible course of Susan's future. In contrast to Susan, there is no question of either biological reproduction or that of social norms within the domestic sphere defining him: he can forego domesticity, form homosocial bonds and still fulfill a viable social role. Thus when Susan's dilemma is put to him hypothetically he can move fluidly between polar opposite positions, from "Loving you how could I not do anything possible to save you?" to "You must speak now!" (i.e. reveal the truth). There being no question of his role in bourgeois domesticity defining him personally, both positions seem equally credible.

As with *Suspicion*'s Lina McLaidlaw the two positions are incompatible for Susan: denouncing her lover is a betrayal of her heterosexual obligation; her complicit silence allows a murderer to go free. Lang is no more concerned with the abstract moral implications of the dilemma than he is with capital punishment *per se*, but Susan's automatic response to Tom's confession ("And all you could think of was murder?") provides her own very personal indictment of Tom, with the additional implication that, should he go free and she remain with him, she too is potentially a victim. Unable to resolve the conflict, she breaks down.

Returning to Mr. Phillips, his reading is just close enough to actual narrative developments to mislead the inattentive viewer. As the governor's inquiry makes clear however ("Is Miss Spencer there with you?") it is not Susan herself who turns Tom in but, presumably, Bob Hale. The last, lingering image of Susan is that of a woman in a state of abject emotional collapse. To make the point that the information that leads to Tom's execution does not come directly from Susan but indirectly via Bob is not mere quibbling: it signifies the final abandoning of Susan's autonomous agency. Lang has also prepared us for the possibility that Bob might become the eventual focus of Susan's heterosexual commitment, not however in the calculated manner imagined by Mr. Phillips but rather in a spirit of final defeat. In an earlier scene Susan's gratitude to Bob expressed itself as atonement ("I never thought I'd be leaning on you, relying on you like this. I'm not sure I deserve it..."). This clearly links with the earlier declaration of her devotion to Tom as additional evidence of her capitulation to self-effacing femininity. The process whereby the imperious woman of the film's first half becomes the woman who relinquishes decision-making to a former lover is a process of patriarchal indoctrination.



## LETTERS

### NATIONALISM AND THE ZIZEK SYNDROME: MORE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

While I mostly agree with Robin Wood's praise of *Beautiful People* (Jasmin Dizdar, 1999), which I also find to be a very rich and complex, yet oddly refreshing comedy about the horrors of war and other serious matters, his text (*CineAction* 54) contains a misspelling that may be of some significance. The family name of two Bosnian refugees, Dzemila and Ismet, has been transformed from Hadzibegovic (as it should read) to "Herbigovich."

This may appear as sheer nitpicking, but this distinction is a symptom of some problems that I have with the film, not addressed in Robin Wood's article. The failure to recognize these issues is understandable because one sometimes has to be intimately familiar with the Balkans to read certain cultural codes easily neglected by "outsiders." "Herbigovich" would be a strange sounding name in Bosnia, signifying perhaps someone of Croat descent. Hadzibegovic, on the other hand, is a typical Bosniak (Muslim) name. This takes us straight to my problem with the depiction of ethnicity and identity in Dizdar's film. Virtually all other characters are satirized or even outright ridiculed, albeit with a lot of sympathy and understanding for their human faults, but this does not seem to apply equally to the Hadzibegovic family. In fact, the film contains a gallery of characters of various ethnic backgrounds from two hybrid nations, Britain and Bosnia, and their idiosyncracies are all subject to humorous dissection, again with the notable exception of people coming from Dizdar's own ethnic group, Bosniaks.<sup>1</sup> The only Bosniaks we see in *Beautiful People* are the Hadzibegovic and those poor people in the war sequence who are being shot at, killed or treated in the makeshift field hospital.

Most characters appear comfortable in the screwball comedy setting, but there is nothing funny about the Bosniak family—they are simply victims. Although it has generally been acknowledged that this was indeed the ethnic group that suffered more than any other during the Bosnian conflict, I believe that Dizdar's point about the ridiculousness of fighting and the fundamental insanity of violence would have come across much more fairly had he not exempted his own nationals from the principles of human behaviour which, he implies, are universal. After all, there are currently several Bosniaks charged with war crimes by the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague, and the simplistic portrayal of them as victims neglects the paradigm of the oppressed becoming the oppressors, which is at least to some extent valid in the case of Bosnia. Had the victim of rape been a Herbigovich rather than a Hadzibegovic, *Beautiful People* would have done a better job avoiding the glorification of the writer/director's own ethnic group at the expense of virtually all others.

This is symptomatic of something I like to call The Zizek Syndrome, after Slavoj Zizek, a widely acclaimed Lacanian theorist, who appears a much more contradictory figure in his native Slovenia. Svetlana Slapsak, one of former Yugoslavia's leading feminist scholars, observes: "Slavoj Zizek... is indeed a good reference in this respect: he presents himself to the West as a Marxist, while in his native Slovenia he operates as ideologist, slightly on the right-wing, of the liberal-democratic party; for the outside world he's a poor intellectual émigré, in Slovenia he's an 'ambassador of science for the world;' moral authority when speaking about the Balkans in the West, he thinks he can

afford sexist and racist outbursts at home."<sup>2</sup> By no means do I wish to equate Jasmin Dizdar with this description of Zizek's dual identity; what I intend to do, however, is to argue that, unfortunately, *Beautiful People* may not be totally devoid of nationalist bias. The same is true of some other films emanating from former Yugoslavia; the Serbian *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (Srdjan Dragojevic, 1996), purportedly balanced in its treatment of the Bosnian conflict, is fairly obviously shot from one perspective, with all non-Serbs appearing as Others. Yugoslav (and perhaps not only Yugoslav) filmmakers, from Aleksandar Petrovic in the sixties, to Emir Kusturica, have repeatedly played the card of "third world exotica" in order to appeal to Western festival and art house audiences.

The saving grace of Dizdar's war comedy is that it treats its characters with benevolent sympathy. It would, therefore, be unfair to accuse the director of narrow-minded nationalism, but it might be prudent to make a point of showing some inconsistencies in his treatment of the Bosnian mayhem, which could easily be missed by viewers less familiar with the situation in Dizdar's native Bosnia. One of the main characters, Pero Guzina, is a good example of the confusing treatment of Bosnia and Bosnians in *Beautiful People*, and perhaps the most telling sign that this is Dizdar's first feature film. Pero is the film's most incoherent character. His name, Guzina, is a fairly typical Serb name, but it should be noted that it also means "a big ass." Although his English is fairly good, we are led to believe, for metaphoric purposes, that he does not understand the word "life." A street-smart immigrant, who knows exactly what to say to British Immigration officials and who spent some time as a combatant in the war, acts extremely naively when he sits down next to a racist gang in a coffee shop and tries to initiate a friendly conversation with them. Anyone coming from the Balkans must find it extremely hard to believe that a character, choosing to play traditional Bosnian music on his walkman (this would be read among urban Balkanites of Pero's generation as a clear sign of rural background), could suddenly turn into a brilliant classical pianist in his in-laws' house. Finally, how likely is it that a person who explicitly wants to put behind the trauma of war and become an integrated member of London society and live a new "life," would keep on the bedroom wall in his council flat a picture of himself in Serb paramilitary uniform, holding a machine gun?

*Beautiful People* has many qualities to compensate for these problems and inconsistencies: the hilarious, almost surreal, sequence of a warm-hearted English soccer hooligan in Bosnia, the film's uplifting sharp humour which manages to shake off the violent, brutal images of war, and the intricate ways in which immigrants interact with members of virtually all classes of British society are just some of them. One can only hope that Dizdar will eliminate any doubt about his progressive intentions in the future films by including representatives of his own ethnic group in his critique of absurd human behaviour. With all its qualities and deficiencies, I have found *Beautiful People* to be much more insightful as an immigrant's treatment of Britain than as an insider's commentary of the war in Bosnia.

—Vladislav Mijic

1. For those less familiar with the region, "Bosnians" is the word commonly used for all citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and "Bosniaks" denotes Bosnian Slavs of Muslim faith.

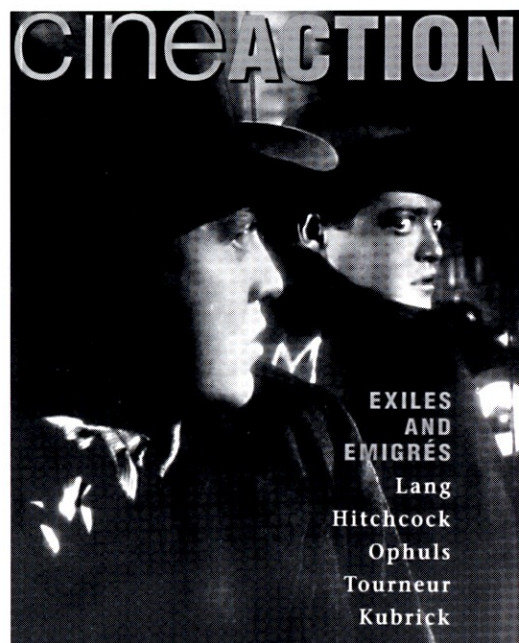
2. Svetlana Slapsak: *Zizek's Lads*, available online at <http://www.nettime.org/nettime.w3archive/199904/msg00383.html>



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This year marks the 50th anniversary of *Cahiers du Cinema*. To commemorate the occasion, we have chosen this still of Ingrid Bergman and Roberto Rossellini backstage following her live performance in Arthur Honegger's *Joan of Arc at the Stake*. (Rossellini and Bergman filmed the oratorio in 1954). Given the magazine's extraordinary commitment to the director, and the fact that it was the only journal at that time to recognize the importance of his work with Bergman, it seems a fitting image to convey our tribute.